

SUSTAINABILITY IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY – EFFECT ON CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS AND PURCHASING HABITS

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International Business
Bachelor's Thesis
Supervisor: Dominika Mirońska
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Objectives:

The primary objective of this study was to analyse the relationship between level of sustainability in fashion brands and consumer perceptions. Additionally, an objective was to see how prevalent the gap was between consumer intent and consumer behavior, in regard to sustainable efforts.

Summary:

Fast fashion, luxury fashion, and the significance of sustainability were all introduced and explained leading up to the literature review. The literature review's purpose was to act as a base for the creation of a conceptual framework, which attempted to analyse different aspects of the two industries relating to sustainability to reach a conclusion about how levels of sustainability can affect consumer perception and purchasing behavior. From this, qualitative research was conducted through a focus group, for the purpose of gaining more insight of how consumers view the concept of sustainability in the fashion industry. This allowed for a thorough analysis of both primary and secondary data, and findings were laid out to reach conclusions for both the research objectives and research questions.

Conclusions:

It was found that while both industries are teeming with sustainable issues, the luxury fashion industry still presents itself with a higher level of sustainability. However, both industries are starting to move in a more sustainable direction. From the focus group, it was shown that sustainability was a very important concept, and that it heavily affected one's perception of any brand. Generally, there was a negative perception of the fast fashion industry, but the gap between attitudes and behavior is still very much prevalent.

Keywords: Fast Fashion, Luxury Fashion, Sustainability, Consumer Perception, Purchasing Habits, Consumer Behavior

Language: English

Grade:

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this bachelor's thesis is to analyse the differences in various supply chain functions seen in the fast fashion and luxury fashion industry related to sustainability. Furthermore, links between sustainable efforts of fashion brands in these two brackets will be made to consumer awareness, perception, and purchasing behavior. In the following sections, the fast fashion industry and luxury fashion industry will be briefly described, along with what it means to operate sustainably. Leading up to the literature review, the research problem, research questions, and research objectives will be discussed. Following the secondary research within the literature review, qualitative data compiled in the form of primary research will be explained and analysed, and lastly, conclusions will be made that link the two areas of research. This research will attempt to provide answers to the research questions listed below.

1.1 Definition of Fast Fashion

Fast fashion is a globally acknowledged phenomenon and has various definitions. However, these definitions still point to central characteristics that the industry has. Stanton (2019) defines fast fashion as a design, manufacturing, and marketing method that relies on rapid production and high volumes of clothing, inherently utilizing trends to replicate high-fashion collections through using low-quality materials. Fletcher (2008) describes fast fashion as clothing collections that are based on current, high-cost luxury trends, and can be seen simply as, "a pressured retaliation that emphasizes disposability" (Joy, et al. 2015). Essentially, the idea of fast fashion is that it offers consumers with a high volume of cheap, low quality alternatives to the latest fashion trends.

1.2 Definition of Luxury Fashion

The luxury sector of fashion is perhaps the polar opposite of what fast fashion is considered to be, with brands in this category being highly recognized and respected, substantially higher price tags, and the concept of exclusivity, which can be said to be non-existent in the fast fashion industry. Ho (2020) highlights certain key characteristics of this industry model, maintaining that luxury fashion is reliant on high

price points and quality, placing it outside the category of necessities for daily life. Here, Ho (2020) explains how luxury fashion is often marketed as a Veblen good. While supply for luxury fashion is kept low, prices increase, with demand also increasing, for the sole reason that luxury fashion consumers are constantly after the exclusivity and appeal as a status symbol. In essence, luxury fashion shares almost no similarities to its fast fashion counterpart.

1.3 Sustainability in the Fashion Sector

As times are constantly changing and evolving, the concept of sustainability within the fashion sector is becoming increasingly imperative, due to consumers' increasing awareness of both the environment and corporate social responsibility of clothing brands (Shen, 2014; Joy, et al., 2015). Sustainability in itself is defined by the United Nation's World Commission on Environment and Development (1987:41) as the capability "[to meet] the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Nguyen, 2018). Joy, et al. (2015) adds to this definition, and describes sustainability as having 3 main definitions. Aside from the United Nation's own definition, Joy et al. (2015) explains that sustainability is, likewise, about "doing unto others as you have them unto you", followed by "an activity that can be continued indefinitely without causing harm." Chen (2014) defines a sustainable fashion product as, "[a product that is] made in an environmental and social friendly manner along supply chain, which includes raw material production, manufacturing, distribution, and retailing." Furthermore, a relevant concept regarding sustainability is known as corporate social responsibility (CSR). Fernando (2021) defines this as "A self-regulating business model that helps a company be socially accountable-to itself, its stakeholders, and the public". In this definition, the main emphasis is put on companies operating in ways that enhance the environment around them, instead of harming it.

However, Joy, et al. (2015) argues that sustainability is deeper than meets the eye, and concerns not only issues affecting the environment, but that it subsequently concerns the everchanging dynamics that affect quality of life and well-being. These factors include, but are not limited to, ecological, economic, and socio-political dimensions. Moreover, Noh & Johnson (2019) maintain that various stages are

involved when fashion brands enter new pieces into their retail stores, and that what is considered sustainable varies within each of these stages. The concept of sustainability entails various interpretations of what it can mean depending on perspective, but essentially, it always boils down to three defining attributes. These universally known attributes, known as the three pillars of corporate sustainability (Beattie, 2019), involve analyzing the environmental, social, and economical practices of companies. As the concept of sustainability is becoming increasingly apparent in the fashion industry, the three pillars will provide a base in order to build an extensive comparison between the fast fashion industry and luxury sector, which can bring certainty to the levels of sustainability seen in these two vastly different industries. These pillars will be analyzed according to the fast fashion and the luxury fashion industry respectively in the literature review.

1.4 Research Problem

Considering the nature of each fashion industry along with the imperativeness of sustainability in today's world, a research problem was constructed. This problem entails the fact that there are many unsustainable aspects seen in both industries, as well as the fact that consumers may still continue to purchase items from unsustainable clothing brands, highlighting a gap between their sustainable attitudes and purchases. Additionally, the research problem will address how and why fashion brands may or may not be moving towards a more sustainable output, while also investigating how the consumer perception is shifted by this. After defining the research problem, certain research questions and research objectives were introduced, in order to present goals for the research to follow. These questions and objectives are shown in the following sections.

1.4.1 Research Questions

RQ1: What is the extent of consumer knowledge on sustainable efforts by fashion brands?

RQ2: How much do consumers prioritize sustainability in their clothing purchases

RQ3: To what extent does consumer knowledge contribute to the perception of fast fashion brands in regard to sustainability?

1.4.2 Research Objectives

RO1: How sustainable efforts done by fashion retailers impact consumer perception and brand image.

RO2: Find out the extent of the discrepancy between sustainable attitudes and purchasing behavior.

RO3: Find how significantly consumers are affected by clothing brands' actions relating to sustainability.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the literature review is to analyze the differences in sustainable practices between the two main types of fashion brands that are seen in the clothing industry: fast-fashion and luxury fashion. The literature review is initially divided into two main parts, each with three subcategories, which will focus on various factors that affect the level of sustainability within these industries, followed by a short analysis for each, and ultimately, a comparison between fast fashion and luxury fashion. The literature review will then focus on consumer perceptions based on the compiled information on the two categories previously specified. This will illustrate consumer's general beliefs and assumptions about sustainable fashion, discuss how the levels of sustainability affect these assumptions, and finally, will go deeper to analyze how these assumptions affect their purchasing behavior. Ultimately, a conceptual framework will be developed based on the compiled secondary data regarding this subject, which will be used to provide the footing for an empirical analysis, which will be shown in its entirety.

2.1 Fast Fashion

There are many views and opinions surrounding the fast fashion sector, and as such, a considerable amount of research has been done regarding the industry in the past. A factor seen in this industry especially is the abundance of lower cost initiatives, which generally result in a significantly lower level of environmental awareness, and subsequently lead to unsustainable practices by many firms within this sector of the

clothing industry (Chen, 2014). However, by analyzing various secondary sources, a debate can be established. While the fast fashion industry is generally seen in regard to being unsustainable, there are certain factors which provide a basis of argumentation that another side exists, in which fast fashion is moving towards a more sustainable output. Production methods and waste, which will be analyzed in the fast fashion world, directly link to the environmental pillar and economic pillar of sustainability, as they describe the overall materials, waste, and costs associated. Continuously, transparency links to the social pillar, as it focuses on companies taking responsibility and securing both employee and community trust (Beattie, 2019). Thus, these three significant attributes seen in the fast fashion supply chain will be discussed.

2.1.1 Production methods

When discussing the production methods seen in the fast fashion industry, it should be noted that at peak points, many large players in this industry focus on shortened lead-times, faster inventory turnovers and high order fulfilment rates for customer demand (Turker & Altuntas, 2014; Torres, et al. 2017). Inevitably, these so-called goals require certain efficiency measures that Turker & Altuntas (2014) continue to gloss over, such as just-in-time sourcing and quick response systems, which tend to disregard numerous ethical and environmental issues that are becoming increasingly important in the current world. Moreover, Joy, et al. (2015) explains that the leading fast fashion houses, such as Zara and H&M, thrive on fast cycles, rapid prototyping and lower costs, which lead to higher volumes of production. Consequently, it seems that they have prioritized these unsustainable practices over superior quality control. Furthermore, many fast fashion manufacturers have been seen to use higher-cost local labor and even expedited shipping methods, when faced with tighter delivery demands, leading to even stronger evidence of their lack of sustainable awareness (Joy, et al. 2015).

However, Shen (2014) illustrates a different viewpoint, and discusses numerous sustainable production method practices seen in one of the most well-known fast fashion brands in the world, H&M. While it is globally acknowledged that apparel manufacturing often takes place in countries with lower labor costs (Shen, 2014), it is

often forgotten that the awareness of the environment and human rights in these countries are simultaneously less developed. Turker & Altuntas (2014) define H&M's objective in their content report as "[to] ensure high social and environmental standards throughout the value chain; set long-term relationship and mutual growth". Shen (2014) continues by arguing that H&M combats the negative reputation of fast fashion in the production scene through taking various initiatives in Bangladesh, which is their main country of production. Most specifically, H&M has focused on training for workers in Bangladesh regarding their rights and fire safety and have placed emphasis the empowerment of these employees (Turker & Altuntas, 2014; Shen, 2014). Further information shows that other fast fashion brands, such as Mango, Calida and C&A have kept close monitoring of their training, corporate social responsibility, and quality control (Turker & Altuntas, 2014). Nonetheless, as Joy, et al. (2015) asserts, many production methods seen in the fast fashion industry are objectively unsustainable, such as their high volume of production and endless stream of products, coupled with repeated disregard for working conditions and the environment. Nonetheless, Shen (2014), along with Turker & Altuntas (2014), indicate that a counterargument exists, and that certain fast fashion chains are addressing the issue of sustainability. Given that this information has only been researched in a smaller scale, the assumption can still be made that fast fashion is still unsustainable regarding production methods seen throughout the industry. There is evidence, however, that a gradual shift towards a more sustainable output exists.

2.1.2 Waste

Fast fashion has seemingly been criticized throughout its existence due to its prominent contribution to global waste, both in terms of textiles and other natural resources (Sorenson & Jorgensen, 2019). An imperative concept regarding waste in the fast fashion industry is environmental justice, coined by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (2018). They define this as "fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies". Bick, et al. (2018) argues that while this agency mainly concerns the issues relating to hazardous waste, it is becoming increasingly relevant for the textile industry, as fast fashion has been constantly

shifting environmental burdens from first world to third-world countries. The fast fashion industry is infested with waste that continues to plague the environment, and one of the most prevalent is the textile itself. As the fast fashion model revolves around high volumes and rapid turnovers, it has done well in manipulating consumers to view clothing as disposable, which has seen extensive criticism (Bick, et al. 2018; Noh & Johnson, 2019). The statistic for fast fashion waste is disturbingly high, with 84 percent of unwanted clothing in the USA alone being sent to landfills (Wicker, 2016).

While a considerable portion of unwanted clothes is still sent to second-hand retailers and beyond, an often case is that these clothes will end up finding themselves in low-income countries, where they will contribute to the clogging of rivers, and environmental hazards (Bick, et al. 2018). Shen (2014) offers a different perspective, as they maintain that H&M has been focusing heavily on local sourcing which not only reduces textile waste and unnecessary production, but subsequently reduces carbon emissions. Moreover, H&M, who stands as the so-called spearhead in fast fashion, claims their sustainability reports point to a necessity to reduce carbon emissions, and they have since attempted to fulfil this need through altering their modes of transport to ferries and trains (Shen, 2014). Even so, this can again be refuted. Sorenson & Jorgensen (2019) assert that while H&M has taken certain steps such as a zero-discharge pledge and a recycling program in an attempt to change their business model and reputation, there is insufficient evidence leading to credible changes in H&M's operations (Robertson, 2020).

2.1.3 Transparency

This aspect of company sustainability has a large impact on brand image and consumer perception. As Torres, et al. (2017) advocates, sustainability reporting is essential in strengthening supply chain sustainability, value creation, and transparency. Moreover, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), which is acknowledged for their sustainability reporting guidelines around the world, emphasizes that sustainability reporting aids companies and organizations alike in managing, measuring performance, and setting sustainable goals. Many past mistakes of fast fashion companies have put an increased importance on company transparency in the clothing industry, and this directly affects consumer image and perception. As the fast

fashion world has been criticized numerous times for their infamous greenwashing campaigns (Moorhouse, 2020), where brands give the image of being sustainable without concrete evidence, the concept of transparency is now a key driver in branding success. Other contributors to the importance of transparency, covered by Jestratić & Rudd (2018) are, but not limited to, the Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh and the tragic chemical leak in Cambodia within H&M production plants. Environmental claims, which can be divided into four main types, are likewise becoming a common strategy that brands have been using to aid positive associations of products with sustainable messages to their consumers (Teona, et al. 2019). The environmental claims that brands usually prefer are the product orientation, process orientation, image orientation, and lastly, environmental facts (ibid). Going deeper, Sustainability reporting in the current world has progressed into becoming Integrated Reporting (IR), which focuses on an even higher level of precision in terms of communication on a company's strategy, performance, governance and prospects which are all analyzed for both the short and long term (Torres, et al., 2019).

In the fast fashion industry, it has been clearly seen that considerable players within experience negative views by their consumers due to lack of transparency. Strälhe & Köksal (2015) asserted that brands such as H&M lacked transparency and argued that in order to change consumer perception, H&M and other similar brands should be increasingly aware of the credibility of their efforts. Furthermore, fast fashion seems to lack concrete solutions to the vast array of issues concerning sustainability. Torres, et al. (2017) suggests that while the fast fashion industry has become increasingly transparent in recent years, the investment into vigorous solutions has since been too weak, which clearly does not do well to change the image of this industry. On the other hand, Shen (2014) continues to dispute this, using H&M as an example of a fast fashion brand that has shown a high sustainable consciousness, and has even implemented a program named Conscious Action, where the uses of eco-materials are accentuated. Turker & Altuntas (2014) however question this emphasized transparency as they mention that when analyzing risks for various fast fashion brands within manufacturing locations, the level of disclosure was not always equal. Out of 9 participant brands, 8 provided social risks, with only 5 providing economic risks associated (Turker & Altuntas, 2014).

Even so, signs still exist that point to sustainability in fast fashion. 60 fast fashion brands, including H&M, have signed the Responsible Sourcing Network pledge in Uzbekistan, a country riddled with child labor and other malpractices (Turker & Altuntas, 2014; Sorenson & Jorgensen, 2019). C&A, another fast fashion brand that was analyzed in the same study, went even further to reject any and all cotton from Uzbekistan, in an attempt to combat child labor and the overuse of chemicals seen there (ibid). Moreover, the Fashion Revolution Transparency Index (2020) rated the H&M group as having a substantially high rating in regard to transparency and was the only brand out of 250 in the 71-80 percent bracket, followed by C&A and Esprit. However, as Torres, et al. (2017) had previously argued, empty commitments are all but too prevalent in the fast fashion industry, and this example can be interpreted as one. Additionally, While Shen (2014) provided credible data disputing H&M's unsustainable practices, they also note that H&M managers are more likely to select countries with a lower quality of life as suppliers, and countries with a higher quality of life as places of inventory. As it stands, there is considerable work to be done in the fast fashion industry in terms of transparency.

2.1.4 Three Pillar Analysis

Referring to the three pillars, it can be seen that in the fast fashion industry, there is some evidence that points to the eventual emphasis on all three, meaning a successful sustainable output. However, based on prior argumentation, the fast fashion industry is perhaps focusing too much on the economic pillar, which encompasses profitability. The issue with this, as Beattie (2019) maintains, is that the economic pillar must not overtake the other two, and that it simply exists to provide a counterweight to drastic decisions that companies are sometimes forced to make, if they aim to create a more sustainable output. With this being said, fast fashion's strongest pillar appears to be the social pillar, as it has been seen that H&M and C&A, among others, have contributed to the improvement of working conditions in low-income countries (Turker & Altuntas, 2014; Sorenson & Jorgensen, 2019). Nonetheless, the industry still requires much improvement, if all three pillars are to be reached in the same level, as many fast fashion brands are still lacking in sustainability reporting, governance, and commitments (Fashion Revolution, 2020).

2.2 Luxury Sector

In terms of perceptions of luxury fashion, dreams, exclusivity, and beauty were the three most ubiquitous associations among a select group of participants (Joy, et al. 2015). D'Anolfo, et al. (2017) provides a further description of luxury fashion, asserting that due to the wide margin between their cost and economic potential, consumers prioritize satisfaction and pleasure in these products, rather than addressing sustainable or environmental needs that they may or may not be fulfilling.

Another aspect that sets the luxury fashion sector far from the fast fashion industry is the fact that fast fashion designs are almost always a lower quality attempt at a luxury item seen on the latest runway performance (Sorenson & Jorgensen, 2019). This aspect, mixed with the pressures of downward pricing, international sourcing, high variety, and low predictability makes the managing aspect of the luxury fashion industry extremely important (Karaosman, et al. 2018). In 2019, the luxury fashion industry was worth a total of 1.2 trillion euros, coupled with an increase of 4 percent every year (Shen, et al. 2020). Identical to the fast fashion industry, the luxury sector follows an ordinal supply chain, which does well in assessing the overall level of sustainability seen in the industry. Through this, the luxury sector will be analyzed in the same categories as the fast fashion industry, in an attempt to generate an image that can subsequently be used when assessing consumer's assumptions. Consecutively, an analysis linking the efforts of the luxury sector will be made against the three pillars of sustainability, to create an image of the level seen in this industry.

2.2.1 Production methods

Like the fast fashion industry, corporate social responsibility (CSR) plays a vital role in the luxury fashion sector especially now, as heightened concentration has now been put on both CSR activities and sustainable activities (Kunz, et al. 2020). Furthermore, the luxury fashion sector plays an important role in the entire fashion industry, as they are the innovators that fast fashion brand goes to for design ideas, while also acting as the motivators for consumers to change their way of consumption (ibid). In the luxury scene, signs that point in the direction of sustainability seem apparent, even at the level of raw materials. Something seen in various luxury textile supply chains is

the recent trend of using certified organic materials, supporting the idea that sustainability is a key supporting role in the world of luxury fashion (Karaosman, et al. 2018). While it resulted in a higher cost of materials in the short run, it still resulted in long-term savings due to mass reductions of water and chemical usage, followed by a reduction of carbon footprints and substantial increases in overall quality, clearly illustrating that the ends justified the means (Karaosman, et al. 2018). Although, O'Flaherty (2017) argues that while the luxury fashion sector's high prices had previously negated adverse media attention in the past, this is gradually becoming less prevalent, and consumers are becoming more aware of sustainable issues seen under the wraps of the luxury scene. The previously neglected unsustainability begins to show its colors in brands such as Louis Vuitton, a major luxury brand in today's world. It has recently come to light that while Louis Vuitton shoes displayed the 'Made in Italy' tag, they had, in reality, been made in Romania, a country known for its cheap labor (Karaosman, et al. 2018).

On the other hand, some luxury brands have put increased focus on the sustainability of their supply chain and have notably taken CSR into account. Gucci, who has previously been under fire for both social and environmental issues, has taken action to right their wrongs (D'Anolfo, et al. 2017). Their updated CSR approach focused on three main areas: human resource protection and promotion, political and economic goals to maintain art and culture, and lastly, strict monitoring of environmental impact management to ensure the production of sustainable commodities in all value chains (ibid). However, Godart & Seong (2014) argue that in the pursuit of eco-sustainability, the luxury sector will always face challenges that may make this goal impossible to reach completely. Fashion itself follows a constant change as new trends emerge, and in luxury fashion, the changes seem to epitomize the concept of luxury. In this way, Godart & Seong (2014) illustrate that while luxury fashion may seem to be vastly different from its fast fashion counterpart, the theme of recurrent change and deep-rooted unsustainability is prevalent in both worlds. Nonetheless, D'Anolfo, et al. (2017) goes forward from Gucci, to expand on two other luxury brands who offer more perspective. Tod's and Bulgari have implemented similar CSR approaches, and both have initiated more sustainable supply chain actions such as ethical codes and policies, and furthermore, eco-friendly collections (ibid). As such, while certain characteristics of the luxury fashion industry point to an impossibility of complete

sustainability, there are companies who are showing that this is merely a generalization.

2.2.2 Waste

Albeit more prevalent in the fast fashion industry, the luxury sector still contributes to a portion of the total waste that the clothing and textile industry produces. As Brown (2019) communicates, Burberry, a well-known luxury brand based in the United Kingdom had been exposed for incinerating a colossal supply of their unsold stock, amounting to tens of millions of dollars. Brown (2019) maintains that other big names in the luxury sector, such as Louis Vuitton and Michael Kors have also, in the past, contributed heavily to waste. Still, there are many signs that seem to point luxury fashion into the right direction, and many strategies have since been portrayed.

When analyzing waste product emerging from the textile industry, the environment is clearly the main entity that is affected. As there are many different business practices involved in the supply chain, ensuring that each obstacle is dealt with effectively is increasingly important towards the reduction of waste products. Carcano (2013) highlights these different challenges, such as the use of renewable energy sources and the monitoring of water in manufacturing plants. Most seen in the luxury clothing supply chain are issues relating to carbon footprint, in the areas of lighting control, temperature control, and transportation (Carcano, 2013; Brown, 2019; Karaosman, et al. 2018). A prevailing issue related to waste in luxury fashion is to do with the procurement of leather products. Here, Karaosman, et al. (2018) asserts that while efforts are being made, such as the collection of rainwater and the integration of a restricted substance list, there still exists evidence that points to sustainability issues in terms of waste that relate to daily business activities. Moreover, while these improvements are being made, it seems that the main incentive for companies were the lower costs involved, instead of the apparent sustainable appeal (Karaosman, et al. 2018). However, many luxury brands now appear to be much more conscious about their decisions. Brands such as Hugo Boss and Burberry have learned from their past mistakes relating to waste, and certain brands have even gone farther. Moreover, Stella McCartney has put themselves on the forefront of sustainable fashion, using recycled ocean plastic and a specialized dyeing technique to not only reduce both

pollution and physical waste, in addition to Gucci reducing the number of physical shows in an attempt to reduce waste during the COVID-19 pandemic (Brown, 2019; Moorhouse, 2020). Compared to the fast fashion industry, the luxury sector has illustrated an advanced and deepened understanding of sustainability, as seen from countless examples. As this sector has always been the pioneer for fast fashion trends, hope exists for an eventual change in supply chain management in both worlds.

2.2.3 Transparency

As the new generation of millennials have almost become the majority consumer, the expectation that they have on the luxury brands to meet their own values is becoming constantly more apparent (Gazzola, et al. 2020). Karaosman, et al. (2018) argues that many luxury brands still lack this transparency factor, including Dior, Hermès and Louis Vuitton, who all were in possession of one or more hazardous chemicals in their production plants (Greenpeace, 2014). Moreover, Rivera (2017) continues to note that Dior especially lacks transparency and scored the lowest in Fashion Revolution's Transparency Index.

There exist certain brands however, that seem to be ahead of the curve regarding transparency. Levi Strauss, perhaps the most famous denim producer in the world, showed exemplary care by analyzing their product's life cycle in order to truly understand where all the negatives of clothing production were rooted from (Moorhouse, 2020). Consecutively, Elvis&Kresse have created a trend of using decommissioned firefighting equipment, parachute silks, and even coffee waste (Brown, 2019). However, in this area of the luxury supply chain, Moorhouse (2020) still argues that few brands have begun to reach a more transparent business model. The introduction of a 'take-back' initiative to incentivize consumers to return unwanted clothing for future discounts on new items is an initial effort, but it still stands unclear as to the full extent of the transparency of these companies, since the final destination of these unwanted clothes is not disclosed (ibid). There is a step into the right direction, but much is still needed to fully exterminate false promises and unfinished initiatives, in order to benefit the consumer, overall sector, and environment (Gazzola, et al. 2020; Moorhouse, 2020; Brown, 2019).

2.2.4 Three Pillar Analysis

The luxury fashion industry seems to be going in the right direction when it comes to sustainable efforts. While numerous brands have made mistakes in the past, such as Burberry and Louis Vuitton (Brown, 2019; Karaosman, et al. 2018), many players in the industry have shown their commitments to sustainability in past years, which leads to the assumption that the fulfilment of the environmental and social pillar in this industry is under way. While Karaosman, et al. (2018) explained how using organic textiles was initially more costly for brands and may have disrupted the fulfilment of the economic pillar, it seemed to have long-term success. In this way, luxury fashion houses such as Gucci, Tod's, Bulgari, Elvis&Kresse and Stella McCartney (Brown, 2019; D'Anolfo, et al. 2017) are showing that even in the world of luxury fashion, where the trends and changes seem to define the luxury aspect itself (Godart & Seong, 2014), the three pillars of sustainability can be reached. While many luxury fashion brands are still behind in their sustainable efforts and CSR, the brands that are stepping up have been successful in maintaining all three pillars, showing that a true sustainable output in the luxury fashion industry can be possible in the future.

2.3 Levels of Sustainability in Fast Fashion Against Luxury Fashion

An extensive analysis of the attributes of the fast fashion and luxury fashion supply chain gives an image of the overall level of sustainability seen in each of these industries. While they can be linked and graded based on their fulfilment of the three pillars of sustainability, they can also be compared based on the Fashion Revolution Transparency Index (2020), due to its extensive showcasing of many fashion brands in both sectors. When analyzing fast fashion and luxury fashion against the three pillars, it is clear that the luxury fashion sector is more favorable overall, especially due to fast fashion's base characteristics. Fast fashion brands are making changes slowly, but due to the rapid turnovers, disposable nature of clothing (Turker & Altuntas, 2014; Joy, et al. 2015) and excessive focus on profitability, the industry requires substantial improvement. The luxury fashion sector, on the other hand, is more favorable according to the three pillars due to the efforts of various brands in CSR reporting and

organic material sourcing (Brown, 2019; Karaosman, et al. 2018; D'Anolfo, et al. 2017).

When comparing the two industries according to Fashion Revolution's Transparency Index (2020), the observations alter. The Index analyzed 250 brands from both industries in five distinct categories: policy and commitments, governance, traceability, workplace ethics (know, show, fix), and spotlight issues (Ditty, 2020). While the index does not necessarily measure the sustainability of the participant brands, it does well in giving an accurate image of problems within certain brands and the industry as a whole and paves the way for solutions to be made. When analyzing data from this list, fast fashion unexpectedly comes out on top, with H&M being the highest average scorer in each category, followed by C&A, Adidas, and Esprit (Ditty, 2020). However, luxury brands such as Gucci, Balenciaga and Saint Laurent displayed substantial progress, with Gucci being the only brand to score perfectly within the policy and commitments section (ibid). In light of this data compilation, it can be concluded that the levels of transparency in certain fast fashion brands are much higher than that of any in the luxury fashion sector, leading to the assumption that the fast fashion industry may not be as unsustainable or unethical as meets the eye. Still, as it stands, the luxury sector appears to be on more stable footing regarding the three pillars of sustainability.

2.4 Consumer Perceptions on Sustainable Efforts

While the responsibility of sustainability mainly rests on the shoulders of the clothing brands that produce and sell clothing, the consumer should not be forgotten. The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR), as Noh & Johnson (2019) assert, reaches beyond making a profit and reflects a commitment to contributing to the wellbeing of a community, which is imperative for clothing manufacturers. Nonetheless, sustainability within a company is multifaceted, and different practices that clothing brands choose to focus on may be seen in different perspectives due to this property seen in the textile industry (Noh & Johnson, 2019).

Strähle & Köksal (2015) and Moorhouse (2020) highlight that fashion labels must closely monitor brand image, from a communicational perspective, as well as strategic

sourcing in order to display and emphasize their sustainable efforts to their consumers, as their values and expectations are ever increasing in regard to sustainability. Considering this, the claim can be made that consumers must be aware of companies' sustainable practices, in order for them to be influenced by them (Noh & Johnson, 2019). Moreover, Park & Kim (2016) discuss that delivering consistent messages and providing full disclosure of company activities, especially in the area of sustainability will initially increase brand trust, which will eventually lead to long-lasting brand loyalty. When on the topic of consumer perceptions, a concept that is directly linked is brand identity, which is defined by Bhattacharya & Sen (2003) as the extent of knowledge that an individual has about a certain brand, consisting of the brand's image and reputation. Brand identity also encompasses an individual's cognitive and affective responses to public brand decisions, which can be linked to evaluations and likings of certain actions put forth by these brands (Noh & Johnson, 2019). Concerning fast fashion brands, such as H&M, Strähle & Köksal (2015) found that individuals had a substantially lower image of them due to various aspects, including but not limited to, the lack of CSR presence, transparency, and sourcing practices. In any case, the textile sector has received constant amounts of criticism throughout its recent boom in the past decades, and as Gazzola, et al. (2020) displays, there exists a positive trend pointing to an increase in consumer expectation towards ethical and environmental approaches in the fashion supply chain.

Park & Kim (2016) argue about the importance of marketing communications when concerning brand trust in the eyes of the consumer. They found that consumer's perceived value of fashion brands that appeared to be sustainable was more based on the level of brand trust, instead of the brand affect. In essence, this means that brands should continue to strive for complete transparency, and full disclosure of their actions to justify their sustainable claims. As a result, fast fashion brands such as H&M, Zara, and Forever 21 experienced significantly weaker perceived values by consumers, due to lack of product longevity and disposable nature of their textile products, all while they attempted to give off a sustainable image (Noh & Johnson, 2019). However, environmental claims made throughout the luxury sector versus the fast fashion industry boded vastly different results. Teona, et al. (2019) suggests that claims made in the luxury fashion sector have more positive effects on consumer perceptions, all while the unsustainable aspects of the supply chain are still as

prevalent as in the fast fashion sector. Teona et al. (2019) provides certain justifications for this way of thinking, as consumers are more likely to ignore the luxury fashion industry's damage on the environment due to the associated themes of exclusivity and high-quality, contrasted to fast fashion, which excessively promotes disposability and low quality. This directly supports the perspective given by Noh & Johnson (2019), with their assertion that perception is heavily dependent on the type of product, and type of consumer. Kuruppu (2018) adds to this and asserts that while the new generation thinks in a sustainable manner, they do not match this with their actions. As most consumers seem to be more price oriented than anything else, they are constantly looking for the best value rather than the most sustainable option (ibid). Moreover, Joy, et al. (2015) gives insight to this seemingly backwards prioritization by consumers. They explain that participants in their study would only choose to buy eco-fashion if it was stylish in their eyes. Essentially, Joy, et al. (2015) concluded that while consumers do care greatly for the environment, it still did not alter their perceptions of brands who were blatantly unsustainable, due to the availability of products and low price.

As consumer perception on sustainability in the fashion sector is based on various attributes, it is increasingly difficult to draw a robust comparison between fast fashion and luxury. Consumers seem to prioritize style over eco-friendliness (Joy, et al. 2015; Kuruppu, 2018), and overall, they choose to buy from fast fashion retailers simply because they would rather buy the substantially cheaper, but similar looking piece. While there are consumers who are more sustainably aware, and readily prefer sustainable fashion over style, the majority consumer perception on sustainable fashion in both industries is not sufficient for an appropriate change. In this sense, for perception to deviate from style-oriented purchases to more sustainable ones, a paradigm shift must take place, starting at the luxury fashion level. From there, it can work its way down to the fast fashion level to fully promote sustainability as a trend in both industries.

2.4.1 Effect of Perception on Purchasing Habits

Bhattacharya & Sen (2003) highlight an important concept known as consumer-company (C-C) identification, which helps to analyze the type of relationship marketers

aim to build with their customers, and vice versa. Continuously, consumer-brand identification (C-B) is another efficient tool used to analyze how and why consumers may be attached to a certain brand, and why they may have loyalty to that brand (Noh & Johnson, 2019). In the subject of sustainability, especially in today's world with the current consumer, seeing how this concept ties in with perception, and ultimately, consumer purchasing habits, is essential. Another vital concept that must be acknowledged when analyzing consumer purchasing habits is anti-consumption. Lee, et al. (2017) describes this phenomenon as an occurrence when consumers resist, reject or reduce the purchasing or ownership of certain commodities. Lee, et al. (2017) further notes that anti-consumption has recently been driven mainly by the lack of CSR in various fashion brands. Although, as previously asserted, consumer perceptions are greatly reliant on the consumer's own knowledge of sustainability (Lee, et al. 2017; Park & Kim, 2016; Joy, et al. 2015; Noh & Johnson, 2019). Joy, et al. (2015) provides linkage of C-B identification to fast fashion companies among a wide group of consumer participants. As previously stated, many of these participants were proactive about sustainability in many areas of life, but still chose to buy unsustainable clothing and had little thoughts about the origins of these clothes, simply because of their emphasis on aesthetic (ibid). Kuruppu (2018) gives further insight to this, arguing that the lack of attachment to sustainable clothing stems from the absence of variety in styles, inadequate functionality, and insufficient certainty that these eco-garments actually help the environment. As such, many consumers may choose not to alter their purchasing habits to more sustainable options, even when these options exist.

2.4.2 The Intention-Behavior Gap

Additionally, the intention-behavior gap, explained by Rausch & Kopplin (2020), provides an understanding of consumer behavior such as mentioned previously. Fundamentally, consumers may have sustainable intentions in mind, but alas struggle to turn these intentions into real actions, due to the conflict of what the consumer wants and what eco-fashion has to offer (Rausch & Kopplin, 2020; Kuruppu, 2018; Joy, et al. 2015). From this, it can be argued that both aesthetic and economic risk negatively mitigate the relationship between consumer purchase intention and purchase behavior (Rausch & Kopplin, 2020). Subsequently, Rausch & Kopplin (2020) highlight two more important factors in identifying the consumer behavior linked to sustainable clothing,

which are environmental and greenwashing concerns. They hypothesized that consumers' environmental concern had a positive impact on the intention of purchasing sustainable clothing, supporting the arguments of Strähle & Köksal (2015) and Moorhouse (2020). Moreover, greenwashing concern was found, unsurprisingly, to have a negative effect on purchasing intention (Rausch & Kopplin, 2020).

Ultimately, when comparing the perceptions of the fast fashion industry to the luxury fashion industry, certain assumptions and conclusions can be made based on the compiled data. In regard to the intention-behavior gap described by Rausch & Kopplin (2020), it appears that the fast fashion industry has a much larger gap, due to consumers' acknowledgement of sustainable issues, but lack of action (Joy, et al. 2015). In the luxury fashion scene, the gap is significantly less prevalent due to its base traits. In some cases, however, consumers may still turn a blind eye to luxury brands' unethical standards, although this is constantly decreasing as the awareness of sustainability is continually developing (Gazzola, et al. 2020). All in all, the fast fashion industry's effect on consumer purchasing behavior in regard to the level of sustainability is lower than that of the luxury fashion industry, due to its lack of fulfillment of the three pillars of sustainability along with its characteristics, that seem to moderate consumer purchasing behavior negatively (Rausch & Kopplin, 2020).

2.5 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework, shown in figure one below, acts as a visual representation of all the data compiled from the literature review, in an attempt to provide a basis for empirical research based on the prior findings.

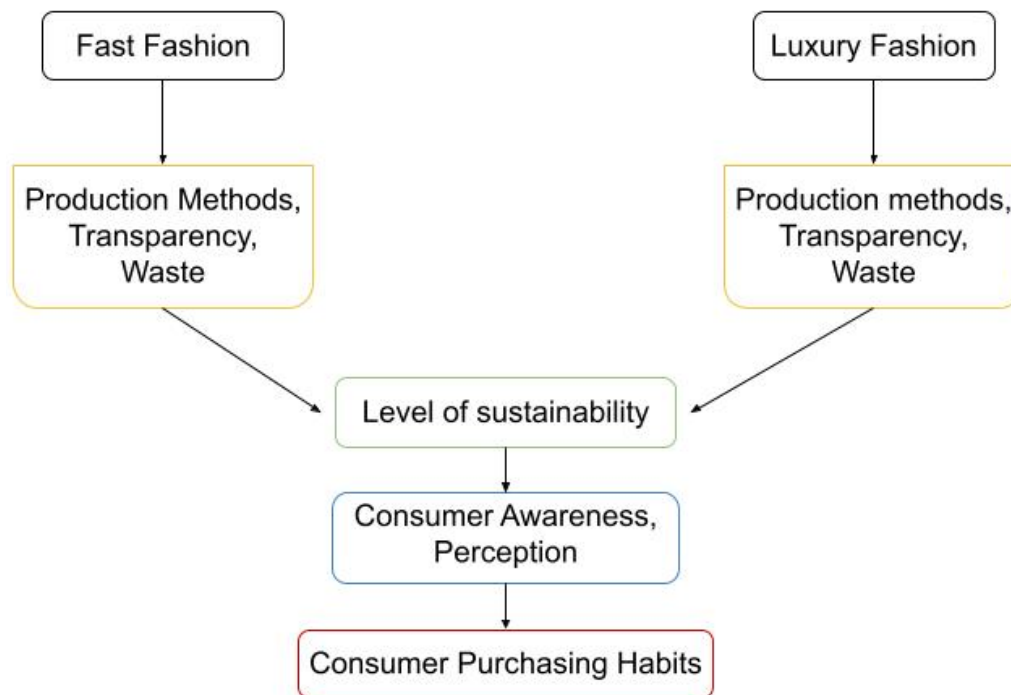


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Effect of Sustainable Efforts of Fashion Companies on Consumer Perception, Awareness, and Purchasing Habits (Warén, 2021)

At the uppermost level of the conceptual framework lies the two areas of the fashion industry that were previously analyzed in the literature review, fast fashion, and luxury fashion. Going forward, these two areas of fashion were studied based on three defining aspects that contribute to sustainability, which have been displayed in the second level of the framework. Here, production methods, company transparency, and waste were both measured and analyzed, which was also done individually for fast fashion and luxury fashion. The two industries were then analyzed according to the three pillars of sustainability, both individually and against each other, as a prelude. The level of sustainability is the consecutive stage of the conceptual framework, which encompasses all compiled information about each area of the supply chain in both fast fashion and luxury fashion, to develop an overall degree of sustainable practices. This directly links to the next section, consumer awareness and perception, which is developed by the level of sustainability seen in the fashion sphere. Ultimately, consumer purchasing habits is the innermost layer, which seeks to describe how the consumer perceptions and awareness gained from the level of sustainability affects the behavior of these consumers, and more specifically, their purchasing habits.

3 METHODOLOGY

This section is designed to illustrate and provide reasoning for the research methods used to collect data in order to reach a conclusion for this study. The sources compiled for this thesis comprise of both primary and secondary research. This section, however, will mainly focus on primary research, which will be based on the previous collection of secondary sources used in the literature review that was used to build a conceptual framework. Essentially, the methodology section will highlight the nature of the primary research. Initially, the method, design and sampling will be explained. Consecutively, the ethics and data analysis will be touched upon, concluding with the possible limitations to the study being analyzed.

3.1 Secondary Research

The secondary research compiled for this thesis is shown in the literature review. The sources used mainly comprised of past research relating to the fast fashion and luxury fashion industry. The secondary research acts as a prelude for the primary research and provides evidence for conclusions for research questions 2 and 3, while also providing substantial information regarding research objectives 1, 2, and 3. While the primary research will be conducted in a different manner, the conclusions from both methods of research will allow for an extensive analysis of the study to be made.

3.2 Primary Research

While the literature review focuses on both the luxury and fast fashion industry for clothing, this research will mainly focus on the fast fashion industry. The main goal of this research is to observe how consumers view the fast fashion industry in terms of their sustainable efforts. Through this, the concept of brand image and consumer perception will be focused on. Furthermore, this research aims to find out how consumers identify sustainability, how they perceive it, and how it links to their purchasing behavior. Moreover, the imbalance of behavior and intent will be discussed, to see how sustainability aligns with the priorities of the consumer. To ensure an efficient transition from ideas to reaching the goals and objectives of this study, a focus group will be formed to provide a basis for qualitative data. The following

sections will highlight the nature of this qualitative interview, and further discuss its methodology.

3.2.1 Method and Design

The gathering of qualitative data in this study will be done, as previously stated, through a focus group. A focus group, as defined by Onwuegbuzie, et al. (2009), is a method of collecting qualitative data, involving the engagement of a small number of people in an informal group discussion, that is primarily focused on a set of issues laid out by the moderator of the group. The study was conducted in this way for a number of reasons. Focus groups are efficient and fast for collecting data from multiple participants at the same time, and due to the socially oriented nature of the group, it can do well in increasing all participants' sense of cohesiveness (Onwuegbuzie, et al. 2009).

In order to fully achieve an efficient and clear-cut discussion, a framework described by Onwuegbuzie, et al. (2009) was used. Certain aspects of the framework were implemented into the planning of the focus group, to ensure that the gathered information would be useful for the objectives of the research. Onwuegbuzie, et al. (2009) explains that well-designed focus groups typically last 1 to 2 hours, and consist of 6 to 12 people, for the purpose of enough diversity in answers, while not being too large of a group that individuals would not feel comfortable sharing their opinions. Furthermore, Krueger (1994) asserts that focus groups should ideally have a moderator, whose main duty is being responsible for facilitating discussion, encouraging all members to speak, and in some cases, displaying a stimulus material or activity in order to increase participation (Onwuegbuzie, et al. 2009). Moreover, holding the focus group in a comfortable and neutral environment is the best way to promote discussions, where participants all share the same language and are all able to see each other (Krueger & Casey, 2001).

Based on this framework, 8 people were chosen for this focus group, and the meeting itself lasted 1 hour. Initially, the plan for this focus group was to hold it physically, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Zoom was used to both conduct and record the meeting. The participants were, as such, able to interact from their own home, and

were still able to see each other through web cameras. As Krueger (1994) suggested, I acted as the moderator during the focus group, to facilitate discussions, ask questions, and encourage individuals to speak.

The questions asked during the focus group were created based on the compiled secondary research included in the literature review. Questions were of open-ended nature, in order to create a basis for discussion. Moreover, the questions were structured in a certain order, which first started on the surface, but went deeper into the topic of sustainability in the fashion industry with each consecutive question. As a way to further ensure that the focus group would stay unbiased, the moderator made sure not to initiate any conversations, stayed neutral, and simply asked the prescribed questions. The moderator continuously made sure to ask questions in a colloquial, understandable manner, to further show that the group was within a relaxed environment.

Within the duration of the focus group, participants were exposed to a guessing activity based on their prior knowledge of the topic. Additionally, the participants were shown various appendices and excerpts, providing further information that they could use while in discussion. Age, gender, and nationality of each participant was collected after the completion of the focus group. The planning and discussion questions for the focus group can be found in the appendices, under appendix 1.

3.2.2 Sampling and Data Collection

The eight participants chosen for this focus group were selected based on a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling, as defined by Dudovskiy (n.d.) as “a technique in which the researcher relies on their own judgement when choosing members of a population to participate in the study”. This kind of sampling can be divided into six categories, with the category here being homogenous sampling, which relies on the researcher to choose participants who all share a similarity, or are part of a particular subgroup (Dudovskiy, n.d.). Continuously, purposive sampling is considered to be increasingly cost-effective and time-effective compared to other sampling options, making it the most applicable for this study. Here, the similarity was that all participants shared an interest in fashion and had considerable knowledge about sustainability in

the fashion industry, compared to the average consumer. They were also all taken from the same pool of university students that studied at Aalto University's Mikkeli Campus. The focus group itself was held on March 3rd, 2021 at 12:00 PM. Below, table 1 displays the age, gender, and nationality of each participant.

Participant #	Age	Gender	Nationality
1	24	Male	Finnish
2	19	Female	Turkish
3	22	Female	Russian
4	25	Male	British
5	20	Female	Finnish
6	22	Female	Finnish
7	21	Male	Finnish
8	21	Female	British

Table 1: Details of Focus Group Participants

3.2.3 Ethics

Regarding the ethics of this study, all participants were informed both during the recruitment process and prior to the start of the discussion that participation was completely and entirely voluntary. Each participant was also informed that their answers and responses would be kept confidential, and only be used for this academic thesis. Lastly, all identities of participants were kept anonymous in the discussion, and names were replaced with the numbers 1 through 8, as shown in table 1.

3.2.4 Data Analysis

As this primary data followed a qualitative nature, the data analysis mainly focuses on the varying attitudes, opinions, and ultimately, perceptions of the participants. As this method follows a more abstract approach, the goal of this research is not to reach a definitive answer or solution to a lack of sustainability in the fashion industry. Rather, the purpose of this focus group discussion was to share different opinions and beliefs regarding the industry as a whole, in order to fully answer the research questions and

research objectives stated in the introductory section of this thesis. A thematic analysis, which is described in the following section, was used to develop conclusions from the data.

3.2.5 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis, as described by Braun & Clarke (2006), is a method used for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (or themes) within data. This type of analysis differs from other methods of analyzing data in the respect that it focuses on identifying patterns within qualitative data, but unlike similar analysis methods, such as IPA and grounded theory, thematic analysis is not grounded (ibid). Furthermore, thematic analysis is ideal when approaching research relating to people's views, opinions, knowledge, or experiences (Caulfield, 2019). Within thematic analysis, there are also certain approaches that will be applicable to this research. As such, the approaches that I used to organize the focus group data were deductive and semantic. As Caulfield (2019) explains, these two approaches to the thematic analysis are based on developing the framework based on themes are found in the text, which involves analyzing the explicit content of the data. The system of thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006) follows a six-phase framework which will be used to make conclusions relating to the focus group data. A table, describing each phase briefly, is shown below (Table 1).

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarization of data	Transcribing data; reading and re-reading; noting down initial codes
2. Generating initial codes	Coding features of the data in a systematic fashion across the dataset, collating data relevant to each code
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4. Reviewing of themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire dataset; generate a thematic 'map'
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme; generation of clear names for each theme

6. Producing the report	Final opportunity for analysis selecting appropriate extracts; discussion of the analysis; relate back to research question or literature; produce report
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Table 1: Six-phase process to Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

After carefully reading through the six-phase process mapped out by Braun & Clarke (2006), a transcript was created from the focus group after the recording had finished. The transcribing process was done in the next days after the recording had finished, using Microsoft Office 365's transcribing tool. The transcription of the focus group was then read over several times, in order to carefully identify themes from the text to be used in the coding process. Braun & Clarke (2006) suggest that themes should capture important concepts in relation to the prescribed research questions and objectives, and that they, to some degree, represent a level of patterned responses within the data set. With this in mind, the initial coding process of the focus group data is shown below, where themes were identified throughout the text to create a base for coding categories (Excerpt 1).

[00:07:36 #4]: Well, I mean, I worked at a, couple years ago, I worked at H&M and COS, which is a sub brand of H&M For about a year or two, and even though they are very big on sustainability and they try it, you know, it shows in the way they maybe try to operate, but just the inherence of, the inherent way they do the business, in response to the latest fashion trends, this just the turnover of stuff in the store is just crazy and so it sort of went against everything else, so it, uh, it was quite shocking to see when you actually saw the new things coming in day after day and you know how can we have this much stuff in the store even?	Warén Alexander Consumer perception on FF
[00:08:28 #5]: I mean, it's the business model that's the biggest issue so even if stores, or like, companies like H&M try to be more sustainable, it doesn't overlook the, you know, whole business model of just mass consumption and production, which I feel like is one of the biggest issues.	Warén Alexander Perception of FF
[00:08:49 #1]: Yeah, and in short, I might even say that fast fashion and sustainability are not compatible with each other.	Warén Alexander Perception of FF
[00:08:58 #5]: Yeah, they're a bit contradictory.	Warén Alexander Perception of FF
[00:09:00 #6]: Yeah, I mean, I agree 'cause like when you produce fast fashion as a company and then you claim to be sustainable, it sort of like contradicts, like it's just the image that you want to like, give consumers, even though it's not actually true. Like if you claim to be sustainable, but you don't actually do sustainable things it's kind of like, where's the point in that.	Warén Alexander Perception of FF

Excerpt 1: Identifying themes to create codes from the data

After the initial identification of themes was completed, I was able to create five coding categories as themes to reach further conclusions about the text. These codes were based on the explicit quotes from participants and were all linked to the prescribed

research questions and objectives. The coding categories that were decided were consumer perception on fast fashion, fashion brand CSR, consumer responsibility, intent-behavior gap, and sustainable purchasing decisions. These are shown below, and each category is highlighted in a different color in order to differentiate them in the data.

1. Consumer perception on Fast Fashion

1. Fashion brand CSR

2. Consumer responsibility

4. Intent-behavior Gap

5. Sustainable Purchasing decisions

From the themes that were derived from the focus group data, the coding process went into the next step, which involved changing each comment to the color of its particular theme. This process is shown below (Excerpt 2).

[00:09:28 #8]: Yeah, the problem isn't just the fact that there's this mass production and strain on sort of, you know, materials, but also the fact that the price is so low so a lot of consumers, then feel that they can buy a lot more of the, um, of the unsustainable goods. So, a mixture of the 2 it creates this mass need for material and often the material and the way that the fast fashion is produced is severely detrimental to the environment and therefore cannot be sustainable.

[00:10:08 #7]: Also like to add to that, like fast fashion is not meant to be like long lasting 'cause you know, they want to sell as much as possible, so like the quality will not be as good and therefore, like, you'll probably need to buy like some more like you know you buy a t-shirt, It's probably gonna last you like a year, max, and then you have to go back in by another t-shirt. You know, like it's not meant to last, so yeah, that kind of goes against sustainability in general already.

[00:10:34 #3]: Yeah, I mean, it's not meant to last, and also just the speed with which like new trends in fashion come out. Obviously, everybody wants like the next shiny, good thing, so it also has to do a lot with the mindset of people who are consciously following all the fashion trends just for the sake of following, I guess. So...

[00:11:03 #1]: And I also think that there's a lot of like, on or there's a big lack of definitional clarity, like many companies might be claiming that we're fully sustainable, but what does that even mean, and who's like you know auditing that they're fully sustainable?

Excerpt 2: Coding themes found within focus group discussion

3.2.6 Limitations of Methodology

While the methodology and data analysis provided sufficient results to be used to reach a conclusion, there were certain limitations to the study. To begin, the framework that was previously laid out by Onwuegbuzie, et al. (2009) was only partly used, and not all aspects of the framework were taken into consideration for this research, which may have affected the overall reliability of the results. Furthermore, Kruger (1994) suggests that two moderators should be utilized, with a secondary moderator being present to audit the data compiled by the primary moderator. However, in this research, only one moderator was used to analyze the focus group data, which may have resulted in misinterpretations or missed understandings. Continuing with this, only one focus group was conducted as opposed to multiple times, meaning that the knowledge gained from this single focus group may be limited in nature. Moreover, the decision to gather qualitative data in the form of a focus group may have also contributed to the limitation of knowledge, as the group of participants only amounted to 8 individuals. As such, the transcribed data may only present a small portion of views and opinions and cannot be generalized.

Purposive sampling, in nature, is based on the researcher handpicking participants from a selected population and is completely reliant on the researcher's own judgement when in the decision phase (Dudovskiy, n.d.). While this sampling method was both time efficient and cost efficient, it had various limitations. These include high vulnerability to errors in the researcher's judgement, chances of bias among the participants, and a possible inability to generalize research findings (Dudovskiy (n.d.)).

While the focus group environment was designed to ensure that all participants felt comfortable with sharing their views and opinions, the fact that it was held online may have affected the extent of discussions that were made while it was active. While it was evident that most, if not all, participants felt comfortable during the focus group, the fact that it was held online instead of physically may have had minor psychological effects on participants, limiting the discussion. Moreover, the focus group was held in English, which was not the mother tongue of all participants. While all participants had a strong proficiency of the English language, this may have contributed to limiting the extent of responses from certain individuals.

4 FINDINGS

The following section focuses on the analysis of the compiled focus group data. The themes that were identified prior to the coding process are shown here and will be further analyzed to reach conclusions.

Generally, all participants showed that they had a deep understanding of sustainability in the fashion sector, and there was a unanimous agreement that the fast fashion industry is teeming with issues relating to sustainability and ethics. However, there was also sufficient evidence pointing to the fact that many participants acknowledged the intent-behavior gap, not only in the big picture, but also within their own spending habits. A deeper analysis of each theme is shown in the following sections.

4.1 Theme 1: Consumer Perception on Fast Fashion

As the focus group discussion mainly revolved around the fast fashion industry, one of the prevalent themes that were found in the coding process was the consumer perceptions on fast fashion. Generally, participants showed that they had a negative perception on fast fashion, explaining that it is unsustainable for many reasons. Key words that participants used were along the lines of 'atrocious' and 'contradictory'. This is further shown in certain responses from participants, shown below.

"It's the business model that's the biggest issue so even if stores, or like, companies like H&M try to be more sustainable, it doesn't overlook the, you know, whole business model of just mass consumption and production, which I feel like is one of the biggest issues." [Participant #5]

"The amount of unsustainability that has been going on recently in the past is, well, atrocious I guess." [Participant #8]

Furthermore, participants seemed to unanimously agree that fast fashion and sustainability seem to go against each other, saying that they can hardly be put into the same category due to the issues revolving around the industry itself. All participants showed a deep understanding of the way the industry operates,

mentioning numerous times that the idea of high volume and low-quality results in deeply rooted issues relating to sustainability. Responses that followed this nature are shown below.

“Fast fashion is not meant to be like long lasting 'cause you know, they want to sell as much as possible, so like the quality will not be as good... it's not meant to last, so yeah, that kind of goes against sustainability in general already.”
[Participant #7]

“I just don't like understand that, how could fast fashion and sustainability be compatible?” [Participant #1]

“The way that the fast fashion is produced is severely detrimental to the environment and therefore cannot be sustainable.” [Participant #8]

Regarding claims in the fast fashion industry relating to sustainability, participants all had similar opinions about the falsified nature of these claims, noting that they had low trust in brands' ability to communicate transparently. Especially during the prescribed activity that was designed to see initial perceptions of the five fast fashion brands presented to them, all participants were skeptical of any brand actually being sustainable and transparent in reality. When results were shown, participant #6 explained how they believed that while a brand may actually have credible data leaning towards the right direction, the perception of the brand did not significantly change simply due to the characteristics surrounding any brand in the fast fashion industry. Ultimately, the responses showed negative perceptions of the fast fashion industry, and there was a unanimous agreement that the industry itself cannot continue to operate in the way that it does currently.

4.2 Theme 2: Fashion Brand CSR

The second theme that was prevalent in the focus group data was the concept of CSR initiatives seen in fashion brands, or lack thereof. As all participants showed a genuine concern for the environment and sustainability, there was a clear agreement that more CSR initiatives should be seen in the fashion industry, and that sustainability should

act as a baseline for the industry itself, rather than being an additive. Examples of these responses are shown below.

“I think that sustainability should not be like seeing as a marketing objective or anything like that, but it should be the base level... And it should not be like treated as a factor that you can like use in order to sell even more.”

[Participant #1]

“I feel like a lot of companies use marketing as a way to expose consumers to more sustainable, you know like their products or you know. But I feel like it should be more, you know, spreading actual knowledge and like educating consumers more than just marketing as a way to kind of spread, you know, sustainable ideas.” [Participant #5]

“I think it's really important to have sustainability as something that's expected of companies nowadays rather than it being a nice add on to that to what they're doing.” [Participant #8]

CSR was a topic that also came up numerous times during the prescribed activity. Here, participants had different views of the brands shown to them, and while some displayed a strong distrust for the brands, there was evidence that some participants were more aware of these brands' activities than others. For example, participants #1 and #4 were surprised that ASOS ranked second out of the five brands shown to them because they had never seen any sustainability reporting from them. Participant #3, however, asserted that they were unsurprised because they had recently seen ASOS actively producing clothing made of sustainable or recyclable materials in the past. Participants #3 and #4 then explained that they had not visited the brand's website for a number of years.

Moreover, there were discussions made about how the responsibility of sustainability falls more on companies, albeit the consumer should not be forgotten. In this way, multiple participants noted how companies can improve the image of themselves to sustainable consumers. Additionally, some participants noted their experience with certain companies, which had increased their perception of them due to their efforts in

informing consumers about how to take care of clothes in order for them to last longer. Responses in this category are shown below.

“The whole sustainability thing, it has more to do with the big brands than individuals in general... It's like better to go for the sustainable options but I feel it has more to do with the big brands than the consumers themselves.”

[Participant #2]

I think for most companies, the goal is to sell more so I think it's always a good sign that a company wants to help you make the piece last longer... [So] when they're actively pushing you to take care of your garment, fixing them and offering services like that, that already is a quite big plus in my book at least, 'cause then that means that the only thing that they're caring about isn't just the money they make. [Participant #4]

“I mean for example, like the clothing store where that where I work, we actually do say, do like tell customers like, when they buy jeans, we're like ‘yeah, don't wash them all the time’ and like try to like take care of it, so it will last longer.”

[Participant #6]

“If you, like, you know, ran a clothing store and you sell very like you know, long-lasting items, you can monetize the fact that you also like offer some kinds of services to like you know make them last even longer or help like the customers to give like take better care of their items you know?”

[Participant #1]

In terms of the perceived sustainability of fashion brands, participants had the same views of rhetorical brands that may have been exposed for unsustainable activities, after previously being sustainable in the past. Participants mainly displayed an abstract understanding of this concept, noting that it depended highly on how these brands were seen in the past. Participants #8, #2, and #6 all shared this view. Participant #1 brought up the idea that there are little regulations in the fashion industry in today's world, which further prevents the industry from shifting entirely to a sustainable output. Generally, the concept of fashion brand CSR was an important

factor for all participants, with unanimous agreement that the industry is shifting in the right direction, but still not enough is being done currently.

4.3 Theme 3: Consumer Responsibility

The third theme that came up numerous times during the focus group discussion was the concept of consumer responsibility, in regard to sustainability in the fashion sector. As stated previously, participants shared a deep understanding of what it means to be sustainable, and in this section especially, they displayed many examples of how consumers can become more aware of the environment surrounding them, noting that actions speak louder than words. Certain responses that followed this nature are shown below.

“I think like consumers are becoming increasingly aware of like sustainability issues, but I don't think we and they know enough in order to like, prioritize it that much, and that should really be changed.” [Participant #6]

“Everybody wants like the next shiny, good thing, so it also has to do a lot with the mindset of people who are consciously following all the fashion trends just for the sake of following, I guess.” [Participant #3]

“I think it's, uhm, up to us as consumers to be, if we want to sort of, live a sustainable life then it's... I would say it's up to us to be aware of all of our consumption, and not be sort of hypocritical in a way.... There's a fine line where you're just sort of 'cherry-picking' what sustainable things in your life are convenient for you, and then disregarding the other ones, so you have to be very careful how you portray yourself.” [Participant #4]

Within the theme of consumer responsibility, a recurring topic was the idea of altering purchasing habits and buying less from retail stores and attempting to buy more from second-hand sources, to reduce unsustainable consumption. While this links to the intent behavior gap that will be discussed in the following section, there were other views that participants touched on that related to this aspect of consumer responsibility. Furthermore, many participants explained how being sustainably

responsible is also possible when buying from fast fashion retailers, asserting that while the brands and clothes themselves may be unsustainable in nature, the way that the clothes are taken care of is of utmost importance, and can change the overall effect that these garments have on the environment. Examples of these comments are shown below.

“You can also like consume fast fashion brands, but you can do it sustainably in a way that you don't like, over-consume, and you actually think about what you buy 'cause you can make the clothes last longer.”
[Participant #6]

“When I do buy from, you know, typically unsustainable brands, then I make sure it's a garment that is sort of timeless, or so that it's not really reflecting the current fashion trends... it really does depend on the consumer as well, and then afterwards do you recycle it, or you know donate it, or something like that”
[Participant #8]

“At least for me if I get a pair of new shoes, I sort of always owe it to myself to use it as much as I can, so it just doesn't sit in, sort of use it 5 times and then you don't really get anything out of it, so that's how I sort of alleviate that pain at least.” [Participant #4]

Overall, participants showed a strong understanding of consumer responsibility in regard to sustainability in the fashion industry. They were not only able to explain aspects relating to the portrayal of individuals who may pretend to be sustainable but are actually not, but also gave insight to how the consumer can further increase the lifespan of clothing and reduce their footprint. Participant #3 even mentioned how people should ‘normalize’ holes in socks, instead of simply throwing them away and reducing the amount of global textile waste. In essence, there was no disagreement in the importance of consumer knowledge and consumer responsibility, and all participants understood that while brands hold a significant responsibility, the consumer's position should not be forgotten.

4.4 Theme 4: Intention-Behavior Gap

The fourth theme, and perhaps the most important of the themes, was the concept of the intent-behavior gap, and how it was seen both in the big-picture and in the perspective of the consumer. This concept, which was described by Rausch & Kopplin (2020), attempts to provide reasoning as to why consumers may still purchase in an unsustainable way, even when they care highly for the environment. Initially, participants touched upon this concept by explaining why this problem exists in the world, maintaining that sustainable options are not always accessible for everyone. Examples of this are shown below.

“Not everyone is like able to buy sustainable, whether it's like people, not being able to access like thrift stores or people not being able to, maybe just afford clothing in general or not being able to find their sizing and stuff like that.”

[Participant #2]

“Unless there is a very easily accessible information about the sustainability, I think it's there, it will continue to be very difficult for people to choose sustainability over, I guess, just how easy it is to just go and buy a piece of clothing from a fast fashion brand.”

[Participant #3]

“I'm like a very money conscious person, like I always have been so it's really hard for me to, you know, spend more, even if I knew it was sustainable.”

[Participant #5]

“Not everyone can afford to buy a €40 T shirt from a sustainable brand, so we need to find ways to make those sustainable products cheaper, while making sure that everyone in the supply chain is making enough money, and that's very difficult... It's a bit of a vicious loop in that sense.”

[Participant #4]

“There are things that, like, keep the gap from like a consumer perspective, so like first of all people might not have the money to contribute that much, and

also like sustainable products might not have like enough availability, or variety, like you don't really- like you, you might not like, find what you actually want, or people don't feel like their contribution makes a difference like in the big picture, or then they just don't know enough.”

[Participant #6]

Additionally, participants explained how this issue resonated with their own spending habits. While not all participants expressed this, a majority of the participants displayed that the intent-behavior gap was relevant to their own purchases for different reasons. Some responses related to this are shown below.

“I think that I've like kept being loyal to a multitude of brands that are, in one way or another, doing unsustainable things like for example, I don't think that there is, like, not so many like sustainable elements in Nike 's business model, but still, I buy stuff from Nike, all the time.”

[Participant #1]

“I have very sustainable attitudes, like you know, I think sustainability is one of the most important things. The like, this, you know, the current of current issues, but I think the power that I have doesn't quite match that. So, my consumption behaviors are slightly less sustainable than my attitudes, although I still, you know, do act sustainably.” [Participant #8]

Adding to this, participants #4, #1, and #5 had similar views about how their intent-behavior gap relies highly on what the brand sells. This was seen especially in the topic of Nike, which was mentioned by participant #1 as being a very unsustainable brand in practice. These participants commented that they do not want to alter their purchasing decisions with this brand, simply because they provide products that they cannot find elsewhere, leading to an assumption that the intent-behavior gap can be linked to exclusivity of certain products. Participant #5 went on to further comment that while they take their fashion consumption choices into account carefully due to their extensive knowledge of the topic, they tend to disregard it when purchasing food products.

Moreover, many participants shared similar views on why the intent-behavior gap is difficult to close, and that it may exist for a long period of time, if not forever. This issue is shown in certain responses that participants made during the discussion, displayed below.

“My analysis is more concerned with the image that I have in my head 'cause it's just so hard for me to like reliably quantify the sustainability that I associate with a certain item.” [Participant #1]

“Like there's always going to be a small gap, but because, like people can't control everything.”
[Participant #6]

“I bought this vegan leather bag that was made by order, so I had to wait for the bag for like 5 months or so. So, like in like this, business model is very much inherently sustainable, 'cause they have zero overproduction. Everything is manufactured only when you order the item, but then it's like it becomes an issue, that's like how many consumers are willing to wait for five months for their product?”
[Participant #1]

Overall, the participants shared a plethora of information regarding the intention-behavior gap seen in consumer's purchasing decisions in the fashion industry. These issues related to lack of consumer knowledge, lack of affordability or accessibility, and the abstractness of what makes a piece of clothing sustainable. However, participant #4 noted that there has been a shift in consumer knowledge, and that generally, consumers do act much more sustainably than they would have a few years ago. Participant #8 also defended their actions by stating that while they felt guilty about certain purchasing decisions they made, they attempted to justify them by trying to make these garments last as long as possible. There was agreement, in regard to this comment, that consumer knowledge is slowly increasing, and the gap is becoming smaller. Nevertheless, there was still unanimous agreement that the gap continues to exist, and that it is difficult to eradicate it completely.

4.5 Theme 5: Sustainable Purchasing Decisions

The fifth and final theme that was prevalent during the focus group discussion was the topic of sustainable purchasing decisions. Here, participants discussed the importance of sustainability, and mentioned various views relating to how their consumer attitudes and behavior has changed in regard to sustainable issues that they are aware of. Participants seemed to share the same opinion in this category, and while issues relating to purchasing decisions were discussed in the previous section, participants further explained how they attempt to purchase in a more sustainable manner. Examples of these responses are shown below.

“After working at H&M, wherever, for a couple of years, it really affected the way I think about things and... I don't really buy like, very rarely buy new clothes, and if I do very, very careful consideration into the brand and everything.”

[Participant #4]

“All my clothes are recycled so like I don't buy anything new and like when I want to buy new stuff, I just sell my old stuff and then then use that money to buy new stuff, so like I don't, I just recycle my clothes, you know, like my whole wardrobe is like recycled.”

[Participant #7]

“I think my consumer behavior has sort of changed over the past couple years since I've been able to get my own income. I used to sort of favor price over sustainability... I've become like more aware of the sustainability and it's become much more important to me, so I buy less, but you know, I don't mind spending a little more on something that's more sustainable now.”

[Participant #8]

“I like I'd like to think that I'm making for example, sustainable consumption choices if I, for example, buy a top from a designer brand 'cause I like, I'm laboring under the under the illusion that I would use it for a very, very long time.” [Participant #1]

In addition, there was evidence in participants wanting to change their current consumption habits to increase their sustainable purchasing behavior. As they acknowledged the intent-behavior gap in their own spending, they explained how they have begun to consume more carefully. Responses are shown below.

“I’m really trying to fight the urge to buy and when, I feel like nowadays what I have been doing is, if I like something and I wanna, I want to buy it like especially from, I mean really, any brand, I tried to go to the there is some, like a second hand like you know selling apps that I try to find it on there first, and if I can’t, and if I really, really have to then buy it then sure I’ll buy from the retailer but I try to buy it from the second hand first.”

[Participant #2]

“I’ve also tried to mitigate that problem by, sort of thinking like, do I sort of, instead of buying new, using stuff that I already have, and I’ve- that sort of introspective, sort of realize that “oh I’ve actually got quite a lot of stuff already, I don’t really need this new thing” and sort of trying to, through that, sort of maybe figure out how I can be like less- consume less and then that way be more sustainable.”

[Participant #4]

Essentially, participants shared the same views regarding sustainable purchasing decisions, and while not all of them consumed in a sustainable way, all participants showed that they are beginning to change their habits to consume in a more careful manner. This stemmed from past experiences at fast fashion brands and the introduction of an increased income for participants.

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This section focuses on making connections between the primary and secondary data. Here, findings from the focus group discussion will be compared with the compiled data from the literature review, and an analysis will be made for the most prevalent themes.

5.1 Connection between Fast Fashion Perception and CSR Initiatives

As discussed in the findings section, a recurring topic that was seen during the focus group discussion was the importance of sustainability, not only in a general sense, but within the world of fashion. Many, if not all participants, maintained perceptions of fast fashion, such as the concepts of high disposability, low quality, and overall lack of sustainable awareness. This directly supports arguments made by Joy, et al. (2015), Turker & Altuntas (2014), and Torres, et al. (2017). Furthermore, the issue of transparency was prominent during the focus group discussion, which can be linked to research done within the literature review. Here, it was clear that sustainably aware consumers have a much higher expectation of fashion brands nowadays and lack company transparency is now being seen as a substantial inhibitor to brand image and consumer perception, which further supports Torres, et al, (2017).

However, discussions were also made during the focus group that related to CSR initiatives done within the fast fashion industry. It was revealed during the focus group that H&M has recently done much towards improving their brand image by increasing their governance and transparency, which supports evidence from Shen (2014). Nevertheless, participants still showed high scepticism when on the topic of fast fashion and sustainability. Some even argued that the two are mutually exclusive and therefore cannot be put into the same category, due to the prevailing sustainable issues seen in the fast fashion industry. While this view supports claims made in the literature review, participants gave a further analysis on how fast fashion consumption can still be considered as sustainable. While this was not extensively discussed in the literature review, it still can be seen as supporting the increased consumer awareness of sustainability in today's world, as more consumers are now becoming more conscious of their spending. In a way, this provides an answer to Strälhe & Köksal (2015), as they asserted that the fast fashion industry is not only riddled with sustainable issues, but there is also a lack of concrete solutions to these problems. Participants showed that consumer responsibility can act as an initial solution in reducing waste.

Generally, it was seen that the fast fashion industry, for the most part, lacks sufficient CSR initiatives, which was extensively looked into, both in the literature review and the

focus group discussion. As such, this resulted in a negative perception of the industry as a whole, with increased scepticism even if a fast fashion brand would claim that they are sustainable due to the issues surrounding greenwashing and exaggerated initiatives.

5.2 Assessment of the Intention-Behavior Gap

The Intention-Behavior gap, explained by Rausch & Kopplin (2020) and described in the literature review, was a prominent topic that encouraged discussion during the focus group. Participants showed a slight resonance with the gap, noting that while all had very strong concerns for sustainability and the environment, it did not always translate in their consumer behavior, which was asserted by Joy, et al. (2015). The reasons for this were mostly relating to lack of monetary funds, lack of availability or lack of variety. Furthermore, the topic of greenwashing concerns was discussed, but in this area, it was mainly focused on the fast fashion industry. As such, there was a direct link to Rausch & Kopplin (2020), because while participants did acknowledge the gap in their own spending, there was still a positive impact on their purchasing intention of sustainable clothing due to their increased environmental concern.

While the luxury fashion industry was a less prevalent topic, there was still evidence during the focus group that supported claims made in the literature review, regarding the gap. While not all participants were consumers of luxury fashion, those that were made it clear that they were aware of the unethical and unsustainable aspects of it. However, there was much said about mitigating the gap, through being a more responsible consumer. While Gazzola, et al. (2020) argued that luxury consumers are likely to ignore sustainability issues in this industry, participants showed a different view, and explained how they make the most out of their clothing even when they are fully aware of the unsustainable methods and materials used in production of a garment.

The Intention-Behavior gap was thoroughly discussed both in the primary and secondary research. From this, it is clear that the gap definitely exists, even in very environmentally aware consumers for reasons beyond their control. However, as the

fashion industry seems to be moving in a more sustainable direction, there are many hopeful predictions that the gap will decrease in the future.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This section focuses on the conclusions found throughout the data. The main findings will be analyzed in relation to the prescribed research questions and will go on to discuss the implications that this study has for international business, as well as suggestions for future research to be done within this topic.

6.1 Main Findings

The main findings for this research mainly relate to the research questions that were shown in the introductory section of this thesis. While the literature review focused on analyzing the fast fashion and luxury fashion industry extensively to determine the levels of sustainability seen in each category respectively, the primary research focused on sustainable issues within the fast fashion industry. In the literature review, findings explained the supply chain processes of each industry, which included production methods, waste, transparency, and an analysis based on the three levels of sustainability, which was also defined within the literature review.

Regarding consumers, the overall consensus was that the knowledge on sustainable efforts done by fashion brands is slowly increasing, and within the focus group, all participants shared a deep understanding of the topic. As such, they were able to discuss many different topics within the concept of fashion brand sustainability and CSR. In essence, a high importance of sustainability was shown throughout participants, which supports the secondary research that was compiled in the literature review. This led to an overall negative attitude towards the fast fashion industry, and as it seems, consumers are quick to highlight the sustainable issues seen throughout the way this sector operates. Subsequently, this gave insight to how the extent of consumer knowledge can contribute to perceptions of the fast fashion industry. In this sense, it became clear that the more knowledge a consumer had about sustainable issues, the more negative their perception would be of fast fashion brands, regardless of their transparency efforts. This directly connects with the conceptual framework

(Figure 1), which aimed to illustrate the connections between consumer awareness, perception, and purchasing decisions. However, there was a prevalence of the intent-behavior gap, which was described in the literature review. In brief, participants who contributed to the primary research acknowledged the gap in their own spending and provided sufficient reasoning to why this issue continues to plague the fashion industry. This involved reasons such as, but not limited to, lack of availability, lack of monetary funds, and insufficient knowledge about the industry in general.

All participants in the primary research shared the same view on the fashion industry's outlook, and came to the conclusion that it is slowly, but surely moving in the right direction. There was evidence that consumers are starting to do their part for the environment by altering their purchasing decisions and buying less from first-hand retailers, and more from second-hand stores. Furthermore, it became clear that fashion brand CSR was an imperative factor for many participants, leading to an increased importance for brands to move in a similar direction as these sustainably conscious consumers. In this area, suggestions were made that included increased focus on transparency and governance, especially for fast fashion brands. Additionally, brands should focus on informing and educating their consumers about how they can increase the lifespan of garments, by washing them less and taking better care of them. Moreover, brands that do operate sustainably currently should focus on initiatives to increase availability and variety of products, while also finding ways to decrease price points to help affordability. Ultimately, sustainable consumption can be achieved in the fashion sector, if both the consumer and producer become more environmentally conscious and prioritize sustainability over monetary ideals.

6.2 Implications for International Business

This study contains certain findings that can be used towards implications for international business. As the general consumer is becoming more aware of sustainable issues in today's world, it is becoming increasingly important for companies to reach this level of expectation in order to maintain customer loyalty and a positive brand image. As most large fashion brands operate on a global scale, it would be beneficial for them if they increased focus on sustainability reporting and

transparency efforts. This is especially important for fast fashion brands, as there is strong evidence that many of large fast fashion brands are responsible for greenwashing or falsely advertising sustainability efforts, which further tarnishes both their brand image and consumer perception. Furthermore, brands who have been boycotted in the past for unsustainable actions may actually be able to win consumers back, if they decide to operate in a fully transparent and sustainable way, leading to not only more profits, but a more sustainable output for the environment. All in all, there is much work to be done in the area of fashion in regard to sustainability, but it can drastically change for the better if companies can change their ways and provide more information to their consumers about all company activities.

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research

As the textile industry is one of the most polluting industries in the world, there are various ways in which research done in a similar area can be perfected. To begin, having more participants used for primary research would allow for more opinions and views to be discussed. Additionally, having multiple focus groups with different groups of individuals would give more insight to the perceptions of the fashion industry, allowing for a more extensive conclusion to be made based on the data. Secondly, as the secondary research included both fast fashion and luxury fashion, research that focused on only one of these industries could provide more extensive information on supply chain activities and outlook in these sectors. In addition, a different sampling method may be used to conduct further research on this topic. As the nature of the primary research relied on purposive sampling which may have induced limited viewpoints, other sampling methods where participants are chosen at random or based on another specific trait could be used to gain further insight to how consumers view sustainability in the fashion sector. Lastly, the research done in regard to company CSR and supply chain actions could be further investigated, and increased focus could be made on a selection of fashion brands to put every one of their actions into light. As the topic of sustainability is imperative in today's world, these steps could be made in order to educate consumers about the deeply rooted issues, and ways to alleviate them.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix 1: Focus Group Planning

1. How do you feel about sustainability? Is sustainability important to you?
2. Would you say that you are aware of the issues regarding sustainability in the fashion industry?

The moderator will define fast fashion: (Oxford) Inexpensive clothing produced rapidly by mass-market retailers in response to the latest trends.

3. What are your initial thoughts about the fast fashion industry when it comes to sustainability? Why?

The moderator will present the group with 5 different fashion brands that are found within Fashion Revolution's Transparency Index. The moderator will then ask them to put them in order, as a group, based on their perceived level of sustainability.

4. For what reasons did you decide to put the brands in this specific order?

Once they have decided, reveal the true order by referencing fashion revolution's transparency index. Here, a picture will be shown of the weighting of the scores to give the participants an idea of the relevance of the index.

5. How do you feel about these results? Do they surprise you?
6. Do these results affect your image of these brands? Would you say you are more (or less) likely to buy from them now?
7. Generally, if a fast fashion brand claims they are sustainable and transparent, who are you more likely to believe? Why?
8. How does the level of a clothing brand's sustainability affect your purchasing decisions?
9. If a clothing brand that you are loyal to is exposed for unsustainable/unethical practices, does this affect your perception of the brand? Are you less likely to buy from them in the future?

Read excerpt (Joy, et al. 2015): "While concerned about the environmental and social impact of their non-fashion purchasing decisions, [participants] did not apply such principles to their consumption of fashion. They talked in general terms of saving the environment, were committed to recycling, and expressed dedication to organic food. Yet, these very same consumers routinely availed themselves of trend-led fashionable clothing that was cheap: i.e., low cost to them, but high cost in environmental and societal terms. They also exhibited relatively little guilt about fast fashion's disposability, seeing little discrepancy between their attitudes toward sustainability and their fashion choices."

10. To what extent does this statement resonate with you?
11. Do you believe there is a gap between your sustainable attitudes and purchasing behavior?
12. In what ways do you think you can reduce this gap?
13. In what ways could clothing brands further promote sustainability?

14. Do you think that the imbalance between sustainable attitudes and sustainable purchasing can be eliminated? Why or why not?

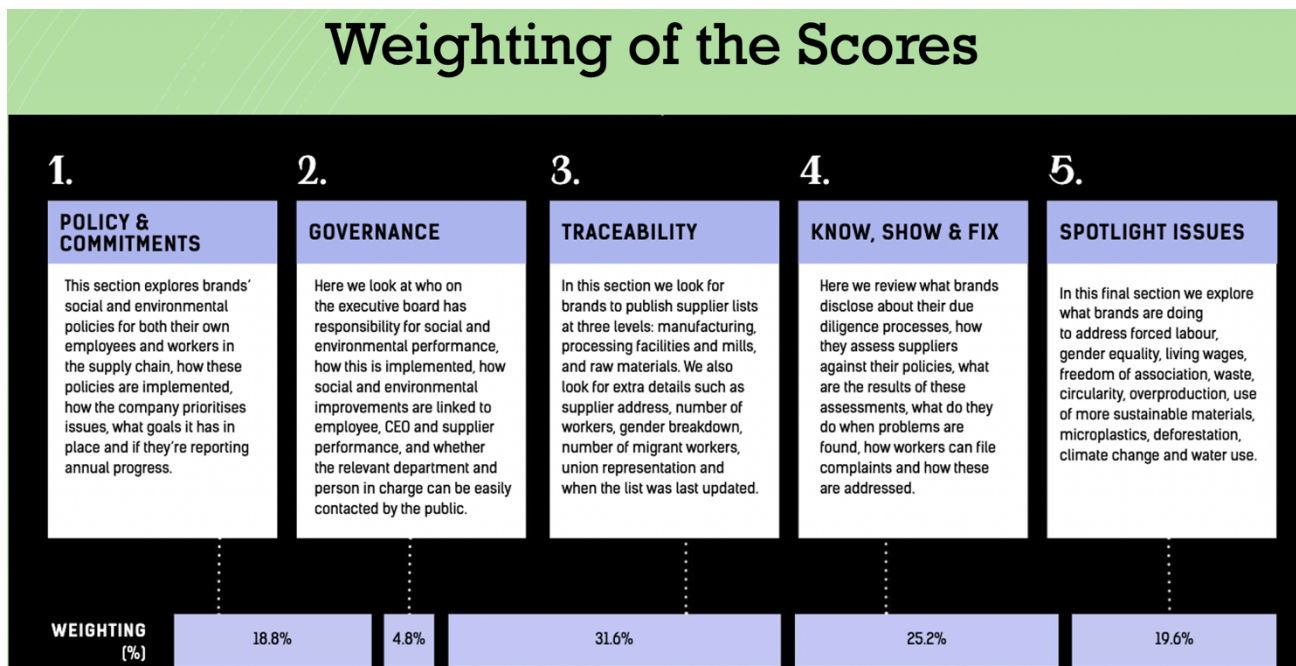
Appendix 2: Focus Group Activity

(Use the annotate option on Zoom for this and draw the numbers 1-5 under each brand.)

1= most sustainable, 5=least sustainable

Participant	ASOS	New Yorker	Mango	H&M	Zara
#1	4	5	3	1	2
#2	2	5	1	4	3
#3	1	5	3	2	4
#4	4	5	2	1	3
#5	2	5	1	4	3
#6	4	5	1	3	2
#7	3	5	2	1	4
#8	2	5	1	3	4

Appendix 3: Weighting of Fashion Revolution's Transparency Index Scores



Appendix 4: Focus Group Transcript

[00:00:00 Moderator]: OK so now it's recording. Well, thank you everybody for coming here! Before we start just like you know the same thing that you've probably heard before. This is completely anonymous, and you know everything that's talked about here is going to be kept confidential and it's only going to be used for the thesis process. Like no information or your names or anything will be shared without your consent, so you guys all got that.

[00:00:28 Moderator]: So yeah, now I guess we can get started, so my first question is, Is sustainability important to you, and why or why not?

[00:00:41 #8]: Yeah, sustainability is really important to me because it's if there's no future for the Earth, then you know, there's no future for us, so...

[00:01:02 #2]: Sustainability is important, but it's not my top priority.

[00:01:02 Moderator]: Why isn't it your top priority?

[00:01:10 #2]: Well, I'm here for a short time, so I don't know, but I mean, it is important. I'm not saying that it's not important, I just said it's not top priority.

[00:01:20 Moderator]: I guess I'll move on to the next question, would you say that you're aware of the issues regarding sustainability in the fashion industry?

[00:01:31 #2]: Yes.

[00:01:31 Moderator]: And, if you can, if you can elaborate on that.

[00:01:39 #2]: Well, you know, nowadays with the fast fashion and stuff, so it's like there's just so much like consumerism has kind of gotten a bit you know, it has increased, but also materialism increase so, just you know a lot of fast fashion and then they produce like almost every day, there's like a new thing being produced then that is pretty bad.

[00:02:05 #1]: Yeah, and kind of touching on the first question as well, I think that sustainability should not be like seeing as a marketing objective or anything like that, but it should be the base level. That like, you know, Of course, we're not destroying the environment or the planet 'cause that would be an awful thing to do. And it should not be like treated as a factor that you can like use in order to sell even more. And there are like huge issues and how we like, you know, impose accountability on the parties that like have an effect on how like sustainable the production is and how like sustainable via consumption like activities or?

[00:02:55 Moderator]: Right, anyone have anything else to add?

[00:02:56 #8]: I agree. I think it's really important to have sustainability as something that's expected of companies nowadays rather than it being a nice add on to that to what they're doing, especially in fashion because the amount

of unsustainability that has been going on recently in the past is, well, atrocious I guess, so to move away from that and to reflect the sort of views of consumers at this time it would be really important.

[00:03:38 #6]: Yeah, I mean, I think like consumers are becoming increasingly aware of like sustainability issues, but I don't think we and they know enough in order to like, prioritize it that much, and that should really be changed.

[00:03:53 #5]: I feel like something like about the whole marketing thing is I feel like a lot of companies use marketing as a way to expose consumers to more sustainable, you know like their products or you know. But I feel like it should be more, you know, spreading actual knowledge and like educating consumers more than just marketing as a way to kind of spread, you know, sustainable ideas. So, kind of going deeper than just marketing and yeah.

[00:04:31 Moderator]: OK should I move on to the next question or did someone still have something to say?

[00:04:39 #4]: Well, I was just thinking when I did my thesis it was on how luxury brands view sustainability and also how they use that in the sort of marketing and stuff and it was interesting to see that there were some back then, there were some studies done, on like how luxury consumers view it and it wasn't a like big priority for them, but it was so like the way of the world, so it forced the luxury brands actually think about this and implement these things into the yeah, so it wasn't really trying to please the, sort of, consumer that they actually want you know is actually buying their product, but this will make their own image better in that sense. So, interesting to see.

[00:05:30 #1]: Yeah, and especially within luxury fashion like that products might be on designed emotional longevity first, in addition to the material is being traditionally of high quality, which of course, like improves longevity like through the durability factors. But then when it comes like, oftentimes when it comes to like the material choices, consumers might have a lot of ambivalence towards luxury products that have been for example, manufactured using recycled materials as that is seen as somehow, like, tarnished goods then. They do not, perhaps, associate like luxury with recycled things which is like a very structural issue, and also like a lot of the materials that are acclaimed to be somehow durable or exquisite if not durable might be sourced from, like, using methods such as, like, using the skins of endangered animal species, just like you know highlight the exclusivity factors, which is again a structural issue.

[00:06:57 Moderator]: This is this is good discussion so far, but I'll move on to our next thing so I'm going to share my screen now. Hold on a second. Wait. So now I'm going to define well, you guys all probably know what fast fashion means anyway, but from the Oxford dictionary, it's defined as inexpensive clothing produced by rapid, rapidly by mass marketing retailers in response to the latest trends so, based on your past knowledge of fast fashion and this definition, what are your thoughts about this industry when it comes to sustainability and why?

[00:07:36 #4]: Well, I mean, I worked at a, couple years ago, I worked at H&M and COS, which is a sub brand of H&M For about a year or two, and even though they are very big on sustainability and they try it, you know, it shows in the way they maybe try to operate, but just the inherence of, the inherent way they do the business, in response to the latest fashion trends, this just the turnover of stuff in the store is just crazy and so it sort of went against everything else, so it, uh, it was quite shocking to see when you actually saw the new things coming in day after day and you know how can we have this much stuff in the store even?

[00:08:28 #5]: I mean, it's the business model that's the biggest issue so even if stores, or like, companies like H&M try to be more sustainable, it doesn't overlook the, you know, whole business model of just mass consumption and production, which I feel like is one of the biggest issues.

[00:08:49 #1]: Yeah, and in short, I might even say that fast fashion and sustainability are not compatible with each other.

[00:08:58 #5]: Yeah, they're a bit contradictory.

[00:09:00 #6]: Yeah, I mean, I agree 'cause like when you produce fast fashion as a company and then you claim to be sustainable, it sort of like contradicts, like it's just the image that you want to like, give consumers, even though it's not actually true. Like if you claim to be sustainable, but you don't actually do sustainable things it's kind of like, where's the point in that.

[00:09:23 #8]: Yeah.

[00:09:23 #1]: I think that-

[00:09:26 #8]: Go ahead.

[00:09:26 #1]: [#8], you go first.

[00:09:28 #8]: Yeah, the problem isn't just the fact that there's this mass production and strain on sort of, you know, materials, but also the fact that the price is so low so a lot of consumers, then feel that they can buy a lot more of the, um, of the unsustainable goods. So, a mixture of the 2 it creates this mass need for material and often the material and the way that the fast fashion is produced is severely detrimental to the environment and therefore cannot be sustainable.

[00:10:08 #7]: Also like to add to that, like fast fashion is not meant to be like long lasting 'cause you know, they want to sell as much as possible, so like the quality will not be as good and therefore, like, you'll probably need to buy like some more like you know you buy a t-shirt, it's probably gonna last you like a year, max, and then you have to go back in by another t-shirt. You know, like it's not meant to last, so yeah, that kind of goes against sustainability in general already.

[00:10:34 #3]: Yeah, I mean, it's not meant to last, and also just the speed with which like new trends in fashion come out. Obviously, everybody wants like the next shiny, good thing, so it also has to do a lot with the mindset of people who are consciously following all the fashion trends just for the sake of following, I guess. So...

[00:11:03 #1]: And I also think that there's a lot of like, on or there's a big lack of definitional clarity, like many companies might be claiming that we're fully sustainable, but what does that even mean, and who's like you know auditing that they're fully sustainable?

[00:11:23 #5]: Yeah, that's something I found in my thesis research, too, that, especially like with fashion. It's so hard to define 'cause there is no like industry standard for it so...

[00:11:38 #3]: I mean there is, there is always ISO.

[00:11:42 #5]: Yeah, yeah, but-

[00:11:42 #3]: People just choose not to pursue this, I guess, expensive valuation because, you can just say that you're sustainable around without having to prove, in this day and age.

[00:11:59 Moderator]: Great should I keep going or did you guys still want to discuss?

[00:12:05 Moderator]: Alright so now I have a little activity for you guys, so I'm gonna present you guys with 5 clothing brands from the fast fashion industry and for my thesis, one of my references is Fashion Revolution's Transparency Index and basically what it is, is like an index that ranks I think a total of 250 brands, both from luxury and fashion fast fashion sector based on a bunch of categories, which I'll go into later but I'm going to show you guys 5 brands and then you're going to try and put them in order and then after that, I'll show you the real order and then we'll talk about that, so these are the 5 brands. I'm sure you're all aware of them, you've all heard of them before. Correct me if I'm wrong has everyone heard of these brands or no.

[00:12:57 Moderator]: Alright great, so now this is where your numbers come into play. So use the annotate option and then just put numbers one through 5, and then we'll talk about the like what you guys thought about when you put them in that order.

[00:13:15 #2]: Yeah, I don't think I'm able to annotate because I'm on my phone.

[00:13:20 Moderator]: Uhhh, OK.

[00:13:21 #8]: You can type it into the into the chat.

[00:13:25 Moderator]: Yeah, you guys can, you can do that too, that works.

[00:13:30 #2]: Oh yeah can you show them again?

[00:13:43 #7]: Where are you supposed to find the annotate?

[00:13:45 Moderator]: It's uh it's like, at the top.

[00:13:49 #8]: If you go to view options.

[00:13:54 #3]: I don't know, they all just seem equally evil to me.

[00:13:58 #5]: Yeah, well, yeah, how do you annotate?

[00:14:04 #6]: OK, I'm not that good at this, I thought I was, but I'm not.

[00:14:09 #5]: Oh, there. I've never used this before, and so how does this work?

[00:14:13 #1]: You see the stuff that I wrote on the board, yes?

[00:14:15 Moderator]: Yeah, I can see I can see everything.

[00:14:28 #8]: I don't think that any of these are necessarily too sustainable, so it's a little bit difficult.

[00:14:37 #4]: I'm guessing a source here is when referring to their own brand in-house stuff?

[00:14:43 Moderator]: Oh yeah, yeah, it is.

[00:14:46 #4]: ****.

[00:14:54 #8]: This is actually really difficult.

[00:14:55 #3]: I'm trying so hard! [laughs] Oh god.

[00:15:00 Moderator]: it would have been easier if we didn't have to do this through Zoom. I would have just gotten a bunch of cards and put them in order for that, but this is what we have to do.

[inaudible]

[00:15:15 #3]: Oh God actually.

[00:15:27 #4]: I can't change the ones anymore. Ahh.

[00:15:39 #8]: Maybe just like write it thick next to it, and yeah.

[00:16:01 #8]: This is actually lowkey fun so...

[00:16:04 Moderator]: That's good to hear. OK, I think everyone's put. Has everyone put their numbers in? I think everyone has. I see [#2]'s in the chat so that's fine.

[00:16:13 Moderator]: OK, so, why did you decide to put these in this specific order? You guys have any, like, things you want to say about why you put them in the order you put them in?

[00:16:25 #5]: Like out of these brands, I feel like Mango is one of the more expensive ones, and then you know, New Yorker is one of the cheapest ones so, and well I mean, H&M and Zara, they're kind of in the same boat for me in my head. I mean, I think Zara is a bit more expensive, but I don't know, I still, like, I don't think they are much more sustainable than H&M.

[00:16:50 #3]: Yeah, but I mean, expensive, less expensive, I don't think it's a good like indication of sustainability because even the luxury brands are incredibly unsustainable and using sometimes even worse materials than, I don't know, H&M.

[00:17:03 #6]: Yeah, I think price was a big driver, like, it gave the first like idea, I think but I don't like I agree with the fact that I don't think any of these are like, sustainable in that sense.

[00:17:19 #3]: Yeah.

[00:17:20 #4]: It's difficult to say, 'cause we don't really know what the, I'm not familiar with the criteria for the index are so... I just went based on like 'cause, I had the like transparency and how things are communicated like 'cause I know that H&M publishes all the factory names and everything for their stuff, but I don't know how big of a portion that is in this index, so I just sort of went based on how much I think these brands, like, talk about the things and stuff.

[00:17:53 #1]: Yeah, I followed the same criterion as [#4] in like you know, thinking about that, like which of these brands have communicated about their sustainability activities the most so that I've been exposed to that information, but I recognize that it might be a very false image of the reality.

[00:18:15 Moderator]: Yeah, don't worry, though. I'll share the criteria once we get into the results but yeah, [#8] keep going?

[00:18:21 #8]: I used a very similar criteria to [#5] so I used price first and then I sort of also thought about how many collections that they may, you know publish per year. The only thing that I wasn't as so sure about was ASOS since I don't really have that much knowledge on that brand so... But the rest of them, I sort of went based off of price and collections that I know that they produce per year.

[00:18:52 Moderator]: Alright are you guys ready to see the results?

[00:18:55 #2]: Yes.

[00:18:57 Moderator]: Hold on. Oh, Oh no Oh my God. [laughs]

[00:19:04 #1]: Take a screenshot take a screenshot of the slide.

[00:19:11 Moderator]: How can I like, remove all of those things?

[00:19:14 #8]: I can click 'clear', but do you have it? I guess it's on the recording so.

[00:19:19 Moderator]: Yeah, it's on the recording. OK, I I cleared everything, yeah, I cleared all of them.

[00:19:24 #6]: You should be able to remove like all of that. Oh, OK.

[00:19:30 Moderator]: OK, well now we'll get into the actual order so, wait- Oh my God. This is so confusing, I hate Zoom... OK here, we go. So, the first one was actually H&M, second one was ASOS, 3rd was Zara, Mango was 4th and New Yorker was last which, I think, Was clear to most of you so-

[00:19:57 #2]: Yeah.

[00:19:57 Moderator]: So, how do you feel about these results?

[00:20:01 #6]: I mean, H&M is like a surprise to me, I think.

[00:20:06 #8]: I knew that they were doing stuff for sustainability, but I still don't think that they were they were like a sustainable, or OK well, I don't know if it's best sustainable, but out of these brands, I wouldn't think that they are the most sustainable.

[00:20:23 Moderator]: I can show you guys also the weighting, if you guys wanna look at that, so this is this is how the scores were weighted, if you guys wanna read that a little bit.

[00:20:35 #1]: For me, it was... for me, it was surprising that ASOS ranks the second, 'cause personally, I'm not sure if I have ever seen anything like sustainability related communication coming from ASOS.

[00:20:50 #6]: Me neither. [laughs]

[00:20:50 #4]: Same. and also like on their websites, like there's not that much information about the product when you look at, into the sort of like description like it's very vague, so I was really surprised about this one as well.

[00:21:05 #3]: I was not very surprised because I've seen a lot of goods made all made out of recyclable material or materials from the ASOS brand.

[00:21:17 #4]: Yeah, I mean, I have, I haven't been on there for like maybe 2-3 years now, so it might have changed as well so yeah?

[00:21:24 #1]: Yeah, same.

[00:21:29 Moderator]: Do you guys want to go back to the to the actual scores or is this fine to keep it on this slide, you guys remember the order?

[00:21:38 Moderator]: OK, well, then I'll keep asking: So, do these results affect your image of these brands? would you say that you're more or less likely to buy from them now after knowing this?

[00:21:50 #8]: I think I've always viewed H&M as a very unsustainable brand, but knowing that they are a little bit more sustainable, I think I would be a little bit, I would feel less guilty buying things from them like I don't think I'd buy necessarily more or less, but I think it's sort of freed my options up to sort of not feel so bad when I'm shopping at H&M.

[00:22:19 #6]: Yeah, I agree but like yeah, it feels like it... I mean, it changes the feeling towards the brand, but it still doesn't take away the fact that the clothes are not good quality, and they don't last very long, so in that case, it's not going to change anything, but...

[00:22:37 #1]: For me personally, even though if the like, the index rating would be 100% for a fast fashion brand, I would still be very skeptical of like the ranking 'cause like I just don't like understand that, how could fast fashion and sustainability be compatible?

[00:22:58 #6]: Same.

[00:22:59 #8]: Agreed, and also I think the policy and commitments that that's that that has a lot of weight into these, this score, as well as traceability, but just because you're traceable and you have a sustainable policy doesn't mean that you actually are, you know, doing those things... I think, I'm not sure.

[00:23:26 #4]: I think it's important to remember that I think this like score was more like, not necessarily indication of sustainability, but how like transparent and like how much they are doing for sustainability, but then maybe, it's not really a measure of how sustainable a brand is.

[00:23:48 #3]: Because I mean, you can trace but if you trace towards, I don't know, beyond like below minimal wage factory conditions you can trace it, but I mean, does it mean anything? No, it doesn't!

[00:24:03 #4]: No, but that's why there's the spotlight issues and public policy, and commitments part as well here, so yeah. I was really surprised at the 1%, or not surprised, but I was surprised how bad New Yorker was, so I mean, 'cause I mean, everyone had the same idea I guess as me, but it was, it was even worse than I thought.

[00:24:28 #8]: Yeah, I knew it was unsustainable and I knew it wasn't really that, like, ethical of a brand, but I usually placed it sort of, I usually grouped H&M, New Yorker, and Zara together in general and I knew that they like, New Yorker was unsustainable but like it was a shock to, you know, that it was like, that bad compared to things that I also thought were unsustainable.

[00:24:59 Moderator]: Should I move on to the next question?

[00:25:01 #8]: Sure.

[00:25:02 Moderator]: OK, so I guess this kind of goes back to what you guys were talking about earlier, but generally if a fast fashion brand claims that they're sustainable and transparent are you likely to believe them? Why or why not?

[00:25:18 #1]: Can you repeat the question?

[00:25:20 Moderator]: Oh yeah, generally if a fast fashion brand claims that they are sustainable and transparent, are you likely to believe them?

[00:25:29 #1]: No.

[00:25:30 #2]: No.

[00:25:30 #3]: No [laughs], no if it's a clearly fast fashion brand, yeah...

[00:25:35 #6]: Yeah, no.

[00:25:37 #7]: I mean, obviously if they have the facts to back it up, then yeah, sure but...

[00:25:43 #8]: I think it goes back to the fact that like, what we were talking about at the start, where a fast fashion... like the whole fast fashion brand model and business model is unsustainable in general, so if someone says that, OK our unsustainable business model is 'actually sustainable', then it's sort of like, it's kind of contradictory in sort of a bit of hypocrisy, I feel.

[00:26:10 Moderator]: Right. OK, quick question. Next one is: How would you say the level of a clothing brand's sustainability affects your purchasing decisions, like just in general? Not, not talking fast fashion here, just like in the big picture.

[00:26:31 #4]: A lot. I would say, like after working at H&M, wherever, for a couple of years, it really affected the way I think about things and... I don't really buy like, very rarely buy new clothes, and if I do very, very careful consideration into the Brand and everything, like so I take everything into account so it's... It's had sort of like an eye-opening experience for myself and that's why I think, you know, that's why I'm like what I am.

[00:27:08 #6]: Yeah, I agree 'cause I've been working at a clothing store as well, and that's basically what has happened to me, like I'm a much more aware than I was before, I think.

[00:27:20 #7]: Yeah, I can relate as well, like all my clothes are recycled so like I don't buy anything new and like when I want to buy new stuff. I just sell my old stuff and then then use that money to buy new stuff, so like I don't. I just recycle my clothes, you know, like my whole wardrobe is like recycled.

[00:27:36 #5]: Yeah, pretty much same.

[00:27:38 #8]: I think my consumer behavior has sort of changed over the past couple years since I've been able to get my own income. I used to sort of favor price over sustainability just because, like I didn't have that much money, but now that I've been able to sort of pick and choose what I actually wear and what, and I sort of price isn't as much of an issue anymore, and I've become like more aware of the sustainability and it's become much more important to me, so I buy less, but you know, I don't mind spending a little more on something that's more sustainable now.

[00:28:22 #2]: Well, I feel my consumer behavior has changed a little bit, like I'm trying to buy less, but also like I really love fashion, and I feel like there is a lot of like kind of blaming the consumer when it comes to the, I mean, when it comes to any industry actually, so like I feel like the whole sustainability thing, it has more to do with the big brands than individuals in general and not... Well, when you actually put it to the general, Not everyone is like able to buy sustainable, whether it's like people, not being able to access like thrift stores or people not being able to, maybe just afford clothing in general or not being able to find their sizing and stuff like that, so I think it's really not the most fair to kind of blame, consumers, either but of course, if you have the choice then of course, it's like better to go for the sustainable options but I feel it has more to do with the big brands than the consumers themselves.

[00:29:36 #1]: For me the whole sustainability question even though I have taken like a myriad of University level courses about fashion, it's still a very abstract concept, 'cause like for example, if like I take a specific case, I quite recently bought Issey Miyake pants that are made of polyester, and I am perfectly aware that polyester is a very unsustainable material in itself, but then I have also been exposed to content in which Issey Miyake says that he has designed this garment to last over 10 years, so for me personally like, am I gonna wear these pants for like

over 10 years? That must be sustainable, right? And then like polyester in itself, it can be recycled and if I'm, you know, someday gonna give up on those pants I can always like sell them forward or like you know, recycle them and not throw them in the bin, but like you know, there are so many factors like and then there's the emotional longevity... Well, I like the pants like that long, and remains to be seen so like you know, it's such like a huge question that is like very hard for me personally to like you know, even like analyze, you know, the sustainability of a certain garment to the point in which I would have some kind of like an understandable, you know, figure in my mind that, OK, this is like 90% sustainable or 10% sustainable or whatever. So, like you know for me personally, it's a very abstract thing.

[00:31:21 Moderator]: That's a good point.

[00:31:23 #3]: I actually do agree with [#1] quite a lot because it takes a lot of time and effort if you actually want to figure out the sustainability of a certain garment, and it's very bold of us to assume that people actually have that kind of time, so unless there is a very easily accessible information about the sustainability, I think it's there, it will continue to be very difficult for people to choose sustainability over, I guess, just how easy it is to just go and buy a piece of clothing from a fast fashion brand so...

[00:32:04 #6]: Yeah, I mean, I think we're talking about like 2 different things here, we're talking about like buying from a sustainable company and like, or then in turn, like consuming sustainably, because you can also like consume fast fashion brands, but you can do it sustainably in a way that you don't like, over-consume, and you actually think about what you buy 'cause you can make the clothes last longer, even though they're not that good of a quality. It really depends on what you do yourself, so I think it's kind of like 2 different things.

[00:32:38 #8]: Yeah, I definitely agree with [#6] that, when I do buy from, you know, typically unsustainable brands, then I make sure it's a garment that is sort of timeless, or so that it's not really reflecting the current fashion trends as much as I could wear it in multiple different occasions or multiple different times, so it really does depend on the consumer as well, and then afterwards do you recycle it, or you know donate it, or something like that so?

[00:33:12 #1]: I think that very, very often, we wash out our governments, instead of wearing them out 'cause like the laundry industry has convinced us to like throw everything in the laundry bin after like one use, even though like there are so many other like different methods that you can you know, use to keep your government fresh and like wash them, like not so frequently.

[00:33:37 #6]: Yeah, I think a big thing about like sustainable consuming is that we have to teach people how to take care of the things that they already have instead of throwing them away and buying new ones.

[00:33:51 #3]: Yeah, also to that, I also think that we should get, I guess normalize I guess holes in garments, because you know like if you get a hole in your sock, of course, you can like stitch back instead of throwing it out or you can just like wear it like that as well, and there shouldn't be any judgment like, it still does its job, I mean, and I bought a like pair of jeans from this brand, they also offer... uhm... like to fix your jeans for free if you get any holes in them, so I think that's also a really good model.

[00:34:28 #4]: Yeah, I think for most companies, the goal is to sell more so I think it's always a good sign that a company wants to help you make the piece last longer, so for example, there's jeans that say, don't if possible, don't wash these all the time and you know, instead of leave- if they would have left that out, the minute your jeans

go bad you just like get a new pair from them, increasing their profit, but then, when they're actively pushing you to take care of your garment fixing them and offering services like that, that already is a quite big plus in my book at least, 'cause then that means that the only thing that they're caring about isn't just the money they make.

[00:35:13 #6]: Yeah, I mean for example, like the clothing store where that where I work, we actually do say, do like tell customers like, when they buy jeans, we're like 'yeah, don't wash them all the time' and like try to like take care of it, so it will last longer.

[00:35:30 #1]: And I think that there are like unmonetized possibilities in this bracket as well so for example, if you, like, you know, ran a clothing store and you sell very like you know, long-lasting items, you can monetize the fact that you also like offer some kinds of services to like you know make them last even longer or help like the customers to give like take better care of their items you know? 'Cause I think that it's like very understandable to consumers as well, that the store needs to make money.

[00:36:06 #6]: Yeah.

[00:36:10 Moderator]: I'll keep going with the questions, but this is a is a great discussion. So, this kind of, I guess relates to the previous question as well, but if a clothing brand that you're loyal to is exposed for unsustainable or unethical practices, how does this affect your perception of the brand, and are you more or less likely to buy from them in the future because of it?

[00:36:38 #8]: It depends how unsustain- or what the unsustainable practices that they're being exposed for. Because I think there's different levels to unsustainability, so if it's generally like, if my if, the brand that I'm loyal to is the most sustainable brand in the world and then they get exposed for unsustainable practices, and then they dropped to number 4 on the list of, like most sustainable brands, then I think of course it will affect my perception of the brand. But it's still one of the most sustainable brands, so I think it sort of depends on how unsustainable in comparison to other brands it is now, and I think that's not necessarily... I think that's down to my own perception as well.

[00:37:29 #6]: Yeah, it really depends on like how unsustainable [slightly inaudible] the activity and like also what are the reasons for that sort of activity and like 'cause it's such a wide question to be honest.

[00:37:45 #2]: Yeah, I feel like- yeah, go ahead.

[00:37:45 #1]: I think that I've like kept being loyal to a multitude of brands that are, in one way or another, doing unsustainable things like for example, I don't think that there is, like, not so many like sustainable elements in Nike 's business model, but still, I buy stuff from Nike, all the time.

[00:38:13 #2]: Yeah.

[00:38:13 #1]: Yeah, even though it's like common knowledge.

[00:38:16 #2]: Yeah, I feel like if I didn't think of the brand as sustainable before when I was loyal before this whole exposing thing happened, then I think my perception probably would change less than if the, if I thought that the

brand was sustainable and then they come to be exposed of something, so it depends on how the brand was before the fact that they were exposed.

[00:38:45 #6]: Yeah, I mean, I've been also like looking a lot of like this topic due to my own thesis and like, brand loyalty has a lot to do with the whole like reaction to a sort of an event and also like the perceptions of the brand before, like if you don't think it's like, if you don't think it's like moderately sustainable, the reaction is going to be different, yeah, compared to like if the company is like 100% sustainable and you think it's like the most like, sustainable ever. So, it really depends on like how the perception was before, 'cause if like you're really loyal to the brand you're like bound to give it like the benefit of the doubt and be like "well, they must have had some reason to do this", or something.

[00:39:33 #5]: I also think that it depends...

[00:39:42 Moderator]: Oh, [#5], I think you're muted.

[00:39:46 #5]: Oh, I'm not muted here...?

[00:39:49 Moderator]: Yeah, I can hear you.

[00:39:50 #5]: OK, I'm sorry my computers microphone is awful, but yeah, I was saying that I also think that it depends on like what the company sells 'cause for example, Nike, I'm very loyal to like Nike shoes 'cause I just really like them, and I feel like I can't find another pair of shoes that I like as much. But then if it comes to like stores that maybe sell like I don't know shirts or pants. I feel like that, those I could find from more sustainable brands as well, so I think it also depends on that.

[00:40:21 #4]: I thought, I was just gonna say like when it comes to like Nike, and like sports, sporting goods in general, where sort of performance of the product is very important, I think it's very difficult sometimes... At least now, for now, it will probably change at some point, but like just to find stuff that performs the same way as these so-called unsustainable brands so like, when I play basketball, there's no sustainable option to a pair of Nike basketball boots unless you buy them used or you buy them so that you sort of, you're not promoting, like, 'new' consumption in a way, but that's really the only option you have and then sometimes you just have to live with that and try to think of every way you can do it and then just hope you can get the most out of the product, then if you have to solve by something that's not so sustainable in a sense.

[00:41:24 #1]: But for me the like probably the majority of Nike shoes that I buy are not for sports, so I can't use that like, argument to mitigate my own internal conundrum.

[00:41:37 #4]: Yeah, yeah, I was thinking, then in that case you sort of, oh, at least for me if I get a pair of new shoes, I sort of always owe it to myself to use it as much as I can, so it just doesn't sit in, sort of use it 5 times and then you don't really get anything out of it, so that's how I sort of alleviate that pain at least.

[00:42:00 Moderator]: Alright guys, so let's keep moving forward since it's taking quite long, and I still have a few questions I wanna ask if that's OK. So now I want you guys to- I can read this out too, but I'm gonna ask you guys questions based on this excerpt from one of my sources so, this was a kind of like a conclusion from one of the research papers I looked at.

[00:42:26 Moderator]: So, “while concerned about the environmental and social impact of their non-fashion purchasing decisions, participants did not apply such principles to their consumption of fashion. They talked in general terms of saving the environment, were committed to recycling, and expressed dedication to organic food. Yet, these very same consumers routinely availed themselves of trend-led fashionable clothing that was cheap, i.e., low cost to them, but high cost and environmental and societal terms. They also exhibited relatively little guilt about fast fashion’s disposability, seeing little discrepancy between their attitudes towards sustainability and their fashion choices”. So, I guess now I wanna ask: to what extent does this statement resonate with you?

[00:43:10 #8]: I think it resonates to some extent where I do feel less guilty about my fashion choices because I know that my consumer like, how I'm going to make the product last longer is sort of like, more important to me than, sort of like the sustained- like the sustainability factor of the actual company. So, if I'm going to use the same like, less sustainable piece of clothing for much longer than I would a more sustainable piece of clothing just because of my current resources of like, you know, my money, for instance, I'm more likely to just sort of feel a bit less guilty about how I how I buy my fashion.

[00:44:08 Moderator]: Does anyone have anything else to add?

[00:44:10 #5]: I feel like I'm kind of the opposite where I consider fashion as like... the areas where I am... I try to be more sustainable. But I think that's because of like the knowledge I have, like for example, when it comes to like sustainable food or, I don't know, cleaning products or whatever, other products that you could buy, I don't really know that much about it, and I haven't really gone through the effort of finding out either at least not yet so yeah. I'm very like educated on, like, the fashion industry so I think that's why I care about it so much more.

[00:44:50 #4]: Yeah, I would say that because this is already well, this is 6 years ago this article came out, Jesus. I think this sort of, information about the fashion industry and this of unsustainability has increased a lot in that time exponentially, so I think there's been a bit more of a sort of, leveling out in this sense, but I know for me personally, both issues are really big parts of how I consume so I don't really recognize myself here but I can see definitely where people would have this situation and especially a couple of years ago, like you see this all the time, but I think it's moving in a better direction now.

[00:45:38 #8]: I definitely agree, yeah.

[00:45:42 Moderator]: I'll keep asking, I'll go on to the next question, so: do you believe that there is a gap between your sustainable attitudes and your purchasing behavior?

[00:45:53 #8]: Somewhat. I have very sustainable attitudes, like you know, I think sustainability is one of the most important things. The like, this, you know, the current of current issues, but I think the power that I have doesn't quite match that. So, my consumption behaviors are slightly less sustainable than my attitudes, although I still, you know, do act sustainably.

[00:46:23 #1]: For me personally, I'm again faced with the... with the difficulty of like defining sustainable consumption for myself, 'cause like you know, as I mentioned earlier, there are so many factors that affect the like the overall sustainability of a product, 'cause like of course the footprint is smaller if I use the same product for 10

years, then for example, 10 months, uhm, so like for me the whole like issue is so very abstract, even though I have read so much about it... So, like I'm not-

[00:47:04 #6]: Yeah, I mean, yeah go ahead.

[00:47:06 #1]: I like I'd like to think that I'm making for example, sustainable consumption choices if I, for example, buy a top from a designer brand 'cause I like, I'm laboring under the under the illusion that I would use it for a very, very long time, and that it has been produced by relatively ethical means, but then it's like, you know, it's like my analysis is more concerned with the image that I have in my head 'cause it's just so hard for me to like reliably quantify the sustainability that I associate with a certain item, and I'm not even sure there are reliable scales for that and that's a big issue.

[00:47:57 Moderator]: Does anyone else have-

[00:47:58 #1]: Someone dropped off the call.

[00:47:59 Moderator]: Yeah, no, [#8] told me. She said that she had to go for, I think she has another thesis interview, so that's unfortunate, but anyway, we still have the rest of you guys so I'll keep going with the questions unless anybody had anything else to say.

[00:48:19 Moderator]: Alright, I'll keep going then so, uh, after talking about this kind of gap between your sustainable attitudes and purchasing behavior, do you think that there are ways that you could, kind of, reduce this gap?

[00:48:37 #2]: Yeah, I am currently trying really hard to fight the urge of buying more, especially within a pandemic. It's kind of become like a hobby for a lot of people to online shop. I assume a lot of you guys can relate also, and like I'm really trying to fight the urge to buy and when, I feel like nowadays what I have been doing is, if I like something and I wanna, I want to buy it like especially from, I mean really, any brand, I tried to go to the there is some, like a second hand like you know selling apps that I try to find it on there first, and if I can't, and if I really, really have to then buy it then sure I'll buy from the retailer but I try to buy it from the second hand first.

[00:49:38 #5]: Like... Like for me like the biggest issue is just money in general like, I'm like a very money conscious person, like I always have been so it's really hard for me to, you know, spend more, even if I knew it was sustainable based on like especially you know with my student budget, so I feel like definitely like when I get grow older, I hope that like I'm able to diminish that gap more.

[00:50:13 #4]: I've also tried to mitigate that problem by, sort of thinking like, do I sort of, instead of buying new, using stuff that I already have, and I've- that sort of introspective, sort of realize that "oh I've actually got quite a lot of stuff already, I don't really need this new thing" and sort of trying to, through that, sort of maybe figure out how I can be like less- consume less and then that way be more sustainable. But, um, that's sort of been like the way for me to deal with it, and so to sort of deal with my shopping... 'will for shopping' as in that sense, but it's been difficult, but then sort of, I've sort of gone to like thrift stores or secondhand stores and sort of buying one small thing and that's sort of helped with that urge as well, so I've noticed that it's sort of my way of coping with it at least.

[00:51:27 Moderator]: Does anyone else have something to add?

[00:51:31 #6]: I mean, maybe just that, obviously, like there's always going to be a small gap, but because, like people can't control everything, but I think that people who don't think it's so black and white like you can take small steps in order to like, make your consumer like consume better and more responsibly.

[00:51:52 Moderator]: Right, OK, so next question is more of a general question, but, in what ways do you think clothing brands could further promote sustainability?

[00:52:12 #7]: By using sustainable materials.

[00:52:19 #4]: I think for like, when you think about H&M, they have these like small collections where they come up with these really new and great innovative sustainable materials, but then, this is happening at the same time as they have their \$2.99 t-shirts. So, it's like it's a move in the right direction, but I don't think they're ever gonna, just the business model will never be able to cope with having everything matter; those sustainable materials, at least not in the next 10 years. So it's sort of... I'm sort of hoping that sort of, they will move away from that and then technological advances will help make those sustainable materials more accessible and cheaper for people 'cause like we were talking about before, not everyone can afford to buy a €40 T shirt from a sustainable brand, so we need to find ways to make those sustainable products cheaper, while making sure that everyone in the supply chain is making enough money, and that's very difficult, I think. You can't really. There's not a lot of overhead on a 5 Euro T-shirt to pay the people who pick the cotton and everything, so it's a bit of a vicious loop in that sense.

[00:53:36 #2]: I feel like they could donate more, because a lot of brands actually burn the clothes after like, after a certain period of time they're burnt, or I don't know what happens, but yeah, if they could just donate them. But I mean, I think this applies more to kind of fast fashion brands and not luxury brands 'cause luxury brands, if they do donate, then they have like a bigger issue of- 'cause, like right now, I'm also doing my thesis on the luxury fashion. So basically, even the middle-class buying luxury fashion kind of decreases the value so if they were to donate then that would be even worse for them, but fast fashion brands or like brands like that could donate.

[00:54:24 #1]: I think that like, there are certain kinds of business models that would be very sustainable, but then like other kinds of issues emerge. Like for example, I bought this vegan leather bag that was made by order, so I had to wait for the bag for like 5 months or so. So, like in like this, business model is very much inherently sustainable, 'cause they have zero overproduction. Everything is manufactured only when you order the item, but then it's like it becomes an issue, that's like how many consumers are willing to wait for five months for their product? So, like there are offered opportunities and options, yeah.

[00:55:09 #3]: Yeah, an incredibly slow fashion.

[00:55:18 Moderator]: Does anyone else have anything to add or should I move on?

[00:55:25 Moderator]: Alright, I just have one last question, it's also kind of general, I guess [#6] also kind of touched upon it, but do you think that the imbalance between sustainable attitudes and sustainable purchasing can be eliminated or not? You think it's possible that this gap can be, you know, fully eradicated, or do you think it's always going to exist?

[00:55:52 #4]: I think information is the first, first part to sort of closing the gap, but I think it's, uhm, up to us as consumers to be, if we want to sort of, live a sustainable life then it's... I would say it's up to us to be aware of all of our consumption, and not be sort of hypocritical in a way. But I mean if someone wants to do little, I mean "everything little helps" as they say. But that sort of, there's a fine line where you're just sort of 'cherry-picking' what sustainable things in your life are convenient for you, and then disregarding the other ones, so you have to be very careful how you portray yourself, 'cause if you want to portray yourself as someone who cares about sustainability, but then you ignore like fashion completely from that, It's a bit, in my eyes at least, a bit concerning of like how genuine you actually are about what you wanna do.

[00:57:05 #1]: I think that like, as I said in the beginning, sustainability should be like the, you know, like the, thing that we expect like the baseline, instead of something extra, and a lot of this like most likely has to do with regulation, 'cause like for example, if we think about the pharmaceutical industry for example, which is like very heavily regulated, and there are of course a lot of bad things happening in that bracket as well, but like you know government and legislation are super involved in this, but like it's so much harder, presently, to like regulate fashion, 'cause like you know, if you like, if some governments would put up like regulations that like fashion needs to be sustainable, there's again the definitional problem that's, what would that even mean, and how do we measure that? When in like other industries, it might be like more, more easily achieved, if you will.

[00:58:12 #5]: Yeah, I agree with what [#6] said, that like not everything is in our control, so it is hard to like, completely eliminate the gap but...

[00:58:23 #6]: Yeah, I mean, there are things that, like, keep the gap from like a consumer perspective, so like first of all people might not have the money to contribute that much, and also like sustainable products might not have like enough availability, or variety, like you don't really-like you, you might not like, find what you actually want, or people don't feel like their contribution makes a difference like in the big picture, or then they just don't know enough, and those are like big issues but also like thinking about it, like you can basically, all of those can be changed and something can be done to them.

[00:59:03 #1]: I think that this is like this reflects on very well on the Pharmaceuticals example, like people don't know enough about Pharmaceuticals, so they have the people at the pharmacy helping them to like to pick out the correct like stuff that they need or doctors. But like you know, for fashion, if you want to make like sustainable choices, even though fashion is one of the most polluting industries, if not the most polluting industry in the world, and like effectively destroying the planet, we really don't have like, people who would be able to help us in the same way. To like, mitigate that like you know, issue.

[00:59:48 #5]: Yeah.

[00:59:51 Moderator]: Does anyone else have something to add?

[00:59:57 Moderator]: Well, OK, well yeah, I guess that's it then. Thanks for all of your responses, I think this was a really good discussion, I think I have a lot of stuff that I'll be able to use for the thesis. So yeah, thank you guys! I'll stop recording now.